

Refugees in Roraima: (im)Mobility of Venezuelan Migrants in Brazil

Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for graduation *with research distinction* in the
undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

by

Jaret Waters

The Ohio State University

April 2021

Project Advisor: Dr. Kendra McSweeney, Department of Geography

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Chapter I: Migration as a geographical issue.....	3
The spatial gap in current work on the Venezuelan diaspora	3
Methodology	6
The intersection of new mobilities scholarship and migration studies: a theoretical approach	10
Structure of the thesis.....	14
Chapter II: Geopolitical and colonial mobility in Roraima over time	15
Chapter III: Roraima as a deterritorialized zone of migration.....	24
From Venezuela to Brazil	24
<i>Operação Acolhida</i> : designations of official channels of mobility	34
The mobility regime beyond the state: diverse modalities of motion.....	46
Chapter IV: Reterritorialization as a localized and discursive practice	57
Continuations of colonial challenges to indigenous mobility and occupation	58
The border as a geopolitical tool.....	62
The state of Roraima vying for control of the border	63
Venezuela's closure of the border as an assertion of sovereignty	68
Local <i>roraimenses</i> usurping control of the mobility regime	72
Chapter V: Rerouting channels of migration—a strategy of territorial ambiguities	78
Interiorization as a strategy of displaced immobilities	78
Roraima: imagining topological futures	86
Chapter VI: Final considerations	93

Chapter I: Migration as a geographical issue

The spatial gap in current work on the Venezuelan diaspora

The political and economic crisis that has disrupted Venezuela over the past several years has engendered a diaspora that has become one of the greatest displaced populations in the world, second only to Syria. In fact, more than 5 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants have left their country, 4 million of whom have resettled within Latin America or the Caribbean, an unprecedented influx for the region. In the past, Venezuela's strong economy and social programs encouraged net immigration; now, it is exporting people.¹ Beginning in 2015, dramatic declines in Venezuela's economy created job losses, food insecurity, and violence. As the domestic situation became increasingly precarious, more impoverished migrants left the country via overland routes, creating a surge in terrestrial border crossings.² Not surprisingly, as of May of 2020, neighboring Colombia has received the vast majority of Venezuela's refugees and migrants—some 1.7 million. Another 260,000 Venezuelans, however, have crossed into Brazil, which is playing an ever-growing role as a recipient country despite there being little historical precedent for Venezuela-Brazil migration.³ Critically, this influx is salient because it is primarily taking place in the northernmost state of Roraima (see Figure 1) the least populous state and, in popular conceptions, one of the most underdeveloped regions in Brazil.

¹ Chaves-González, Diego, and Carlos Echeverría-Estrada. *Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Regional Profile*. Migration Policy Institute, 2020, www.migrationpolicy.org/research/venezuelans-latin-america-caribbean-regional-profile.

² Ibid.

³ "Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela." *R4V*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020, data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/platform.

Figure 1: Map of Venezuela and the bordering Brazilian state of Roraima⁴



A growing body of research is documenting the responses to these unprecedented influxes of Venezuelan migrants into Brazil. This work, ranging from academic articles to studies conducted by international organizations, encompasses four broad themes: migrants' economic integration into the labor market, access to healthcare, humanitarian coordination (including civil society reception of migrants), and migrants' legal documentation and regularization.⁵ While this work helps to elucidate the immediate problems facing this new surge of migrants, it leaves several questions unanswered. For example: beyond the official channels of

⁴ Lopes, Marina, and Nick Miroff. "Hungry Venezuelans Flood Brazilian Towns, as Threat of Mass Migration Looms," January 1, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/hungry-venezuelans-flood-brazilian-towns-as-threat-of-migration-looms/2017/01/01/39f85822-c6d1-11e6-acda-59924caa2450_story.html?utm_term=.dcbbf5f12123.

⁵ Selee, Andrew and Jessica Bolter. Migration Policy Institute, 2020, An Uneven Welcome: Latin American and Caribbean Responses to Venezuelan and Nicaraguan Migration, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Venezuela-Nicaragua-Migration2020-EN-Final.pdf> and Jarochinski Silva, João Carlos. *Migrações Venezuelanas*. Edited by Rosana Baeninger, Universidade Estadual De Campinas, 2018.

migration established by the Brazilian government, what alternative routes are Venezuelan migrants using to flee their country? In what way does the local Brazilian community at the border participate in bordering practices? To what extent are migrants able to maintain proximity to the border? In short, the *spatial* elements of the migrant exodus remain seriously underexplored. This gap is noticeable, because in contexts of migration from the Global South to the Global North, these questions are much more central. In fact, even when reviewing the work focusing on the much more expansive migration of Venezuelans into Colombia, these issues have already been raised, as evidenced by studies on the transformation of the border as a militarized zone⁶ and strategic location for armed guerrilla agents⁷.

My project addresses this gap by focusing on how the question of mobility and immobility impacts Venezuelan migrants in Brazil, in order to better understand the several agents that comprise the Brazilian migration regime and how migrants negotiate forms of spatial power. I will use this case study of Venezuelans in Brazil to build the case for a dialectic between mobility and immobility. Specially, I will:

- 1) Trace the history of mobility in the state of Roraima. I will focus primarily on a) the ways in which mobility in the region has historically been constructed and practiced in relation to Venezuela and the border; and b) how the mobility has also been a key component of the Brazilian settler colonial project in the region. Highlighting these points will not only allow me to contextualize the current migratory situation, but also demonstrates that Roraima is not actually an isolated zone, as many often believe.

⁶ Martínez, Mario Valero. “La Frontera Colombo-Venezolana: Escenarios De Conflictos.” *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 289 (2020): 95–106.

⁷ Rodríguez Rodríguez, David. 2021. *El impacto de la estrategia del Estado colombiano en la presencia del ELN en la frontera colombo-venezolana de Arauca*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10554/53356>

- 2) Analyze the ways in which, and why, the multiple agents that operate at the border aim to facilitate the flows of Venezuelan migrants into the national territory. I will aim to illustrate a) the typical path migrants face; b) the infrastructure and process that the federal government has developed in collaboration with the civil society and international organizations to create an official channel of movement; and c) the ways in which migrants and the local community have developed their own infrastructure and practices to support alternative forms of movement across the border and into Roraima.
- 3) Document the challenges that migrants face when navigating through this multifaceted mobility regime. I will use specific examples, including deportations of migrants, closures of the border, and xenophobic attacks, to underscore how even supposedly frictionless spaces experience immobility and violent mobilities.
- 4) Reflect on efforts by the Brazilian government to channel these flows outside of Roraima. I will focus specifically on the country's interiorization program, which aims to relocate migrants from Roraima to other regions of the country on a voluntary basis. In doing so, I will raise critical questions about the limitations of mobility as a form of liberation.

In addressing these questions, I will predominantly focus on terrestrial border crossings in Roraima, although Venezuelan migration in Brazil does occur by air as well. As well, when discussing this migration, I will focus specifically on the period from 2015 to 2020 (prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic).

Methodology

In order to address all of these questions, I used a mixed-methods approach that best provided me with 'on-the-ground' insight to understand the inner workings of the migratory

processes. Firstly, I conducted an extensive review of secondary research on the topic. I used reports produced by the Brazilian government (e.g., from the Federal Police's Emergency Assistance Committee, set up to monitor the management of the resettlement), Brazilian academics and civil society organizations, and international organizations monitoring the response. This review served at the basis for addressing Objective 1 and provided a wide variety of insights and graphics for the remaining Objectives.

Secondly, I conducted a systematic media analysis of Brazilian and Venezuelan news sources. Using Google News (setting the language and country settings to Portuguese-Brazil and Spanish-Venezuela), I conducted a series of searches using the following terms (in Spanish and Portuguese):

migrant, Venezuelan(s), migration, Roraima, Boa Vista, Pacaraima, border, refugee, Venezuela, interiorization, Santa Elena de Uairén, indigenous, xenophobia, Operation Acolhida

I limited the search results to show only those articles written between January 1, 2015 to March 1, 2020. Also, I limited the results to a specific series of outlets: *Folha de São Paulo*, O Globo, BBC Brasil, *Folha de Boa Vista*, BBC Mundo, *El Universal*, and Reuters. Doing so yielded a more manageable sample of articles, while also including both national and regional coverage in both Venezuela and Brazil. The coverage was much more extensive among Brazilian outlets, in comparison to Venezuelan outlets. Whereas the Venezuelan sources I found predominantly consisted of cut-and-dry news stories, the Brazilian sources contained a wide diversity of feature, news, and investigative pieces. Within this Brazilian subset, the local sources (such as *Folha de Boa Vista*) contained more of the didactic news pieces, whereas the national sources presented more investigative and feature pieces. From these initial searches, I obtained a sample of just

over 100 articles, after which I continued to narrow the sample to roughly 50 articles that were directly related to my objectives. This sample then allowed me to respond to a variety of questions related to Objectives 2, 3, and 4, including detailed descriptions of local happenings and conditions and the prominent discourses surrounding these events.

Furthermore, I initially had intended to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, both with individuals involved in the response to the influx of migrants (e.g., people working in the civil society or international organizations) and migrants themselves. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I planned on conducting interviews virtually. I was fortunate to receive an Undergraduate Research Scholarship for the spring of 2021 from the College of Arts and Sciences offset the costs of my education and allow me to dedicate more time to this thesis. However, despite having several contacts working in the field of migration in Brazil, I experienced additional difficulties establishing contact with potential leads. After I reached out, most potential participants either did not respond or expressed initial interest and then stopped responding. I believe this is because, in addition to the fact that the pandemic deeply complicated the field of migration, people are experiencing Zoom/virtual burnout in general. In the end, I conducted two interviews, one with a representative from an international organization coordinating the response who has had experience in Roraima and at the national headquarters and another with an individual working at a nonprofit that supports migrants in Roraima and São Paulo. I was hoping that these would lead to further interviews as a snowball strategy, but the contact unfortunately ended after the first interview. For the purposes of my project, I only ended up including some information presented by the first interview, considering much of the content of the second fell outside of the scope. Nonetheless, many of the news articles I reviewed

fortunately provided a more ethnographic perspective on the issues that compensated for the lack of fieldwork.

Finally, in order to best apply this methodology to my research questions, I relied on my own relevant experiences, skills, and education. Firstly, I am majoring in Spanish, which I have studied for a total of eight years now, and minoring in Portuguese, which I have studied for a total of three years now. Being fluent in both of these languages was crucial to navigate the sources that I used, as few of them were in English. Beyond my knowledge of the languages, my coursework in Spanish and Portuguese has given me broad exposure to issues related to politics and migration throughout Latin America. Most importantly, my coursework in the Portuguese department has provided me with a thorough understanding of the modern sociopolitical history and geography of Brazil. Moreover, through Ohio State, I have had the opportunity to go to Brazil on three different occasions, one of which was an immersion experience. In fact, the idea for this project emerged while I was studying abroad in the South of Brazil (in the city of Florianópolis) and I met a Venezuelan migrant who had made the nearly 5,000-kilometer journey from the border to Florianópolis by land. I was shocked to learn about the paths that Venezuelan migrants took to leave the border region, leading me to question more about the state of Roraima itself and Venezuelan mobility throughout the country. On a personal level, the Venezuelan diaspora has been of great interest to me for several years now, as my best friend from high school immigrated to the U.S. from Venezuela in the early 2000s and introduced me to the study of Spanish and the current Venezuelan crisis.

The intersection of new mobilities scholarship and migration studies: a theoretical approach

In order to frame my research approach, I primarily engage with a new literature within geography (and the social sciences as a whole) known as new mobilities scholarship. Prior to the emergence of this literature, the social sciences field was dominated by a deeply a-mobile perspective, which often treated places as constituted by sedentarism, and failed to recognize the ways in which the mobilities of people, non-human agents, and resources produced these places. As such, one of its foremost priorities it to denaturalize these theories of sedentarism, which “[treat] as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placelessness.”⁸ In doing so, new mobilities scholars emphasize the ways in which all places are connected to some extent and cannot be viewed as “islands.”⁹ At the same time, however, new mobilities scholars reject theoretical approaches that focus on “postnational deterritorialization processes and the end of states as containers for societies.”¹⁰ This rejection is notable for two key reasons. Firstly, it recognizes the seemingly paradoxical processes that often occur in the modern world by which the “quickenings of liquidity” in some spaces or for some individuals is accompanied by “disconnection, social exclusion, and inaudibility” for others.¹¹ In other words, new mobilities literature does not focus exclusively on mobility at the expense of moorings and immobility; rather, it works to understand how the two are deeply interrelated. Secondly, this approach departs from the common tendency to romanticize mobility as a form of liberation from space and place. Rather than fetishizing mobility, it aims to understand the conditions that

⁸ Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. “The New Mobilities Paradigm.” *Environment and Planning A* 38 (February 2006): 208. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a37268>.

⁹ Ibid., p. 209

¹⁰ Ibid., p.210

¹¹ Ibid.

facilitate (some types of) mobility. In sum, new mobilities scholars view mobility as a reflection of power because “mobility is a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship.”¹²

One of the key insights that has been proposed in new mobilities literature that will serve as the basis for much of my argument is the dialectical relationship between processes of reterritorialization and deterritorialization. When applying these insights about sedentarism and liquid modernity to the concept of the nation, new mobilities scholars conceive of mobility as pertaining to a process of deterritorialization, while moorings pertain to the realm of reterritorialization. Rather than claiming that one has come to dominate the other in the modern world, they argue that “the forms of detachment or ‘deterritorialization’ associated with ‘liquid modernity’ [...] are always accompanied by rhizomic attachments and reterritorializations of various kinds.”¹³ In doing so, they reject an understanding of national territories as simple containers in favor of “complex, polymorphic, and multiscalar regulatory geographies”, which allow for processes of migration to be understood as localization productions of specific practices.¹⁴

Indeed, by applying new mobilities scholarship to the field of migration studies, scholars have been able to connect these processes of mobility, migration, and territoriality. Traditionally, many migration scholars have seen migration as a “linear relocation”, where the movement is simply from point A to point B and the variable of interest is the process of integration in the destination country.¹⁵ More recently, however, the trajectory itself is gaining popularity as the unit of analysis, which has led to the development of the concept of mobility regimes. Mobility

¹² Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. “The New Mobilities Paradigm.” *Environment and Planning A* 38 (February 2006): 211. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a37268>.

¹³ Hannam, Kevin, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry. “Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings.” *Mobilities* 1, no. 1 (2006): 3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450100500489189>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Schwarz, Inga. “Migrants Moving through Mobility Regimes: The Trajectory Approach as a Tool to Reveal Migratory Processes.” *Geoforum* 116 (2020): 218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.03.007>.

regimes are defined as systems “that normalize the movements of some travelers while criminalizing and entrapping the ventures of others”, thus representing not only the nation-state apparatus, but also international organizations, civil society, and local practices.¹⁶ In this way, mobility regimes help to bring mobility studies into dialogue with migration studies. Most relevant to my argument, mobility regimes are understood as complex geographical processes which delocalize borders. That is to say, borders do not exist in one simple place (as defined by the nation-state), but rather “[materialize] through border practices that are geographically scattered and in many cases invisible.”¹⁷ In this sense, I will treat the previously described dialectic between deterritorialization and reterritorialization as a process of negotiating these border practices at different sites in different moments.

Additionally, towards the end of my argument, I will bring this literature into conversation with theories of topology and topography to understand the relationship between mobility and the localities of origin and destination. Whereas topography aims to parse the world into static and discrete containers, topology departs from this absolute view to propose a relational conception of space in constant transformation. As Lash theorizes, “Topographical objects are located in, move in (topographical) space. Topological objects are not located in space at all. [...] They are instead spaces of movement.”¹⁸ New mobilities scholars have made similar claims, rejecting sedentarist ontologies of localities in favor of understanding places as constituted by mobility. In other words, places cannot be “fixed, given, and separate from those

¹⁶ Wimmer, Andreas, and Nina Glick Schiller. “Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences.” *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043>.

¹⁷ Schwarz, Inga. “Migrants Moving through Mobility Regimes: The Trajectory Approach as a Tool to Reveal Migratory Processes.” *Geoforum* 116 (2020): 219. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.03.007>.

¹⁸ Lash, Scott. “Deforming the Figure: Topology and the Social Imaginary.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 4-5 (2012): 265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276412448829>.

visiting.”¹⁹ Thus, introducing literature on topology and topography will allow me to expand on this paradigm shift in more explicit and well-defined terms.

Finally, in order to frame and guide the elements of Venezuelan mobility in Brazil that I will analyze, I will refer to Cresswell’s elements of politics of mobility and his concept of constellations of mobility.²⁰ Cresswell defines a constellation of mobility as a “particular [pattern] of movement, representations of movement, and ways of practicing movement that make sense together.”²¹ In other words, looking at mobility as a constellation helps to highlight the ways in which mobility does not just consist of movement, but it also is a discursively produced representation and an embodied and practiced experience. Furthermore, he delineates the following elements to highlight the relationship between constellations of mobility and power²²:

- Motive force: what drives a person or thing to move?
- Velocity: how fast does a person or thing move?
- Rhythm: how is a ‘normal’ social order produced through constant rhythms in which a person or thing moves?
- Route: what path does the movement take?
- Experience: how is the movement felt as an embodied experience?
- Friction: when and how does the movement stop?

¹⁹ Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. “The New Mobilities Paradigm.” *Environment and Planning A* 38 (February 2006): 214. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a37268>.

²⁰ Cresswell, Tim. “Towards a politics of mobility.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (February 2010): 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d11407>.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18

²² *Ibid.*

Throughout different sections of this work, I will explore these questions to ensure that I paint a comprehensive picture of the mobility regime in Brazil and the politics of this regime.

Structure of the thesis

I have divided the body of this work into four main chapters. In Chapter II, I describe the colonial and geopolitical forms of mobility that have historically existed throughout the state of Roraima, in order to set the stage for the current changes in mobility in the region. In Chapter III, I present a thorough overview of the characteristics of the recent influx and emphasize the relatively frictionless path these migrants face, given both the coordinated response from the federal government and the more local, quotidian reality of the porous border. In Chapter IV, I will qualify this notion of a seemingly deterritorialized zone by describing several different specific examples of how agents within Roraima, including the local government, police forces, and local residents, have challenged this mobility and worked to reinforce boundaries between the two countries. In Chapter V, I will analyze the interiorization program, which aims to relocate migrants living in Roraima to other regions of the country, both in terms of what it means for those migrants who choose to participate and the state of Roraima itself. Finally, in Chapter VI, I will offer my final considerations on the empirical, methodological, and theoretical contributions of this work.

Chapter II: Geopolitical and colonial mobility in Roraima over time

In order to better understand the current influx of Venezuelan migrants into the state of Roraima, it is critical to understand the historical construction of mobility throughout the region. Doing so indicates that, contrary to popular belief, Roraima has never been a sedentary region that has only recently been overwhelmed by movement. As the new mobilities scholars emphasize, “all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an ‘island.’”²³ In this section, I will emphasize how the history of mobility throughout Roraima has been deeply intertwined with both the geopolitics of the border and the settler colonial impetus to occupy indigenous land. In addition to confirming the claims of the new mobilities scholars, mapping this history will set the stage for more appropriately understanding the way that mobility operates in the region today with the intensified influx of Venezuelan migrants.

The mobility regime near the border has historically focused on encouraging and enabling movement from other regions and even other countries in favor of colonial occupation and development of the Amazon region. Although the first records of Portuguese colonial contact with indigenous lands and communities in what is today the state of Roraima occurred with the invasion of Pedro Teixeira in 1639, the area did not become a site of extensive colonial occupation until the twentieth century. Specifically, the turn of the century saw an influx of migrants from several regions of the country in search of economic gains from rubber production and cattle raising within the Amazon. As these activities began to decline partway through the

²³ Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. “The New Mobilities Paradigm.” *Environment and Planning A* 38 (February 2006): 207–26. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a37268>.

1910s, many were attracted to the region surrounding the Rio Branco (see Figure 2) due to its gold and diamond mines, consequently leading to a surge in *garimpo* (small-scale, often informal

Figure 2: Map of the principal rivers flowing through the state of Roraima²⁴



mining activities often focused on gold in the Amazon) that reached nearly 60% of the region's economic activity by the early 1940s.²⁵ In this case (as in future cases), the existence of

²⁴ "BR-174." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, March 13, 2021. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BR-174>.

²⁵ Silveira, Isolda Maciel da, and Marcelo Gatti. "Notas Sobre a Ocupação De Roraima, Migração e Colonização." *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi, Série Antropologia* 4, no. 1 (1988): 43–64. <https://repositorio.museu-goeldi.br/handle/mgoeldi/467>.

economic opportunities without the corresponding infrastructure to support mobility beyond these specific sites made migration unsustainable. In the face of such failed colonization attempts, the fact that migrants resettled in the banks of the Rio Branco underscore the value of having access to channels of connection with other regions.

It was not until the midcentury, however, that sponsoring colonial mobility became a prominent component of the state's territoriality project. In 1943, President Getúlio Vargas established five Federal Territories throughout the border zones in the Amazon, including one in the Rio Branco region (which would later come to be renamed Roraima). According to Vargas, the establishment of these federal units represented the need to "occupy the empty spaces of the national territory", especially in the context of World War II. It is critical to note here the way in which the case for mobility is built upon the negation of the existence of indigenous communities. In order to buttress this strategy, the state began to exercise a greater administrative and military presence in this region.²⁶ In addition to the Federal Territories, the government established several agricultural colonies through the 1940s, providing families with transport, economic support, and tools (among other items) to channel them into the region. In fact, the Coronel Mota Colony, founded in 1953, specifically aimed to attract Japanese immigrants interested in farming the land. However, by the 1960s, many families had abandoned the colonies because of their limited accessibility to surrounding areas.²⁷ In this sense, the lack of further mechanisms and infrastructure to support local movement (and by extension access to

²⁶ Barbosa da Silva, Altiva. "Geopolítica Na Fronteira Norte Do Brasil: o Papel Das Forças Armadas Nas Transformações Sócio-Espaciais Do Estado De Roraima," 2007. <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8136/tde-28052010-102349/pt-br.php>.

²⁷ Silveira, Isolda Maciel da, and Marcelo Gatti. "Notas Sobre a Ocupação De Roraima, Migração e Colonização." *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi, Série Antropologia* 4, no. 1 (1988): 43–64. <https://repositorio.museu-goeldi.br/handle/mgoeldi/467>.

resources) made this mobility project unsustainable. Once again, as settlers abandoned the colonies, settlements along the Rio Branco expanded due to the accessibility the river provided to other regions.²⁸

The emergence of the military dictatorship in 1964 marked a shift in the state strategy, as the government invested in a more aggressive mobility regime that would buttress its economic and geopolitical project. The rise of the dictatorship came within the context of the Cold War, at a time when Roraima became an increasingly critical location in ‘protecting’ the country from the spread of communism. In addition to Guyana gaining independence from England in 1966 and nationalizing its main sectors two years later, Venezuela was experiencing an unstable political moment in the wake of the Cuban Revolution.²⁹ In response to these growing geopolitical concerns, the regime was notably more aggressive in reviving the seemingly failed colonial projects of the previous decades, offering plots of land and financial incentives to those interested in settling in the region.³⁰ Such efforts helped support wide expansion of *garimpo* activities in the region, with estimates placing the number of *garimpeiro* (people who participate in *garimpo*) migrants around 40,000. In addition, these ideological concerns also led to increased military presence in Roraima with the aim of securing the border.³¹ However, as aforementioned,

²⁸ Silveira, Isolda Maciel da, and Marcelo Gatti. “Notas Sobre a Ocupação De Roraima, Migração e Colonização.” *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi, Série Antropologia* 4, no. 1 (1988): 43–64. <https://repositorio.museu-goeldi.br/handle/mgoeldi/467>.

²⁹ Barbosa da Silva, Altiva. “Geopolítica Na Fronteira Norte Do Brasil: o Papel Das Forças Armadas Nas Transformações Sócio-Espaciais Do Estado De Roraima,” 2007. <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8136/tde-28052010-102349/pt-br.php>.

³⁰ Da Silva Oliveira, Rafael. “As Transformações Na Organização Espacial Do Estado De Roraima: Uma Conversa Inicial a Partir Da BR-174.” *Revista Acta Geográfica* 1 (2007): 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.5654/actageo2007.0101.0003>.

³¹ Barbosa da Silva, Altiva. “Geopolítica Na Fronteira Norte Do Brasil: o Papel Das Forças Armadas Nas Transformações Sócio-Espaciais Do Estado De Roraima,” 2007. <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8136/tde-28052010-102349/pt-br.php>.

the continuity of these colonial projects could not rely on economic or even security incentives alone.

In order to increase the velocity of this movement (or perhaps to reduce the concomitant ecological friction), the dictatorship materialized its mobility regime by expanding local infrastructure, despite the immobilizations that such moorings created. Beyond just ‘occupying’ the spaces in Roraima, the dictatorship had the explicit goal of connecting this region to the more populous southern regions of the country.³² As such, in addition to sponsoring colonization projects, they invested in road and highway projects. Most notably, this period witnessed the extension of the BR-174 highway from Manaus (AM) through Boa Vista, representing an additional stretch of 971 kilometers cleared (though unpaved) by 1977.³³ From 1980 to 1991, the annual rate of population growth reached 9.6%, the highest level for the country, which as a whole was growing at a rate of 1.89%.³⁴ It is critical to note that, while this action was able to channel a wave of mobility into the state in search of gold and other metals, the channel itself entailed the immobilization and displacement of indigenous communities in the region to more remote areas. Not only did the road cut directly through lands inhabited by the Yanomami communities of Waimiri-Atroari and Wai-Wai, but the concomitant settlements of *garimpeiros* along the road led to intense deforestation of the region. Ironically, prior to the construction of the road, the government established reservations for these same communities in areas that it

³² Barbosa da Silva, Altiva. “Geopolítica Na Fronteira Norte Do Brasil: o Papel Das Forças Armadas Nas Transformações Sócio-Espaciais Do Estado De Roraima,” 2007. <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8136/tde-28052010-102349/pt-br.php>.

³³ Da Silva Oliveira, Rafael. “As Transformações Na Organização Espacial Do Estado De Roraima: Uma Conversa Inicial a Partir Da BR-174.” *Revista Acta Geográfica* 1 (2007): 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.5654/actageo2007.0101.0003>.

³⁴ Crocia de Barros, Nilson. “Mobilidade Populacional Ocupacional, Fronteira e Dinâmica Das Paisagens Na Amazônia: o Caso De Roraima, Brasil.” *Cadernos de Estudos Sociais* 12, no. 2 (1996): 237–84. <https://periodicos.fundaj.gov.br/CAD/article/view/1187>.

would inevitably divide with the BR-174.³⁵ As a result of these ensuing colonial conflicts, the Waimiri-Atroari population dropped from 3,000 in 1968 to 350 in 1983.³⁶ In this sense, it becomes clear that mobility, though expanded under the military dictatorship, is a differentially accessible resource, as the regime consists of several overlapping systems “that normalize the movements of some travelers while criminalising and entrapping the ventures of others.”³⁷

Critically, though, despite the durability of the mobility regime’s infrastructure, it is constantly renegotiated. For instance, almost immediately following the opening of the BR-174 segment connecting the south to Roraima, a regular bus route was created between Manaus and Boa Vista to further mobilize settlement of the region. However, the indigenous resistance within local communities did not only lead to their displacement and death, but also helped to shut down vehicular traffic along the stretches of the highway that pass through Waimiri-Atroari territory every day from 6:00 PM to 6 AM. Nonetheless, the Manaus-Boa Vista bus line was exempt from this rule.³⁸ Thus, the state had to strike a balance between the mobility required for its own colonial occupation project and the mobility of indigenous communities, demonstrating the ways in which the mobility of some often implies the immobility of others. Furthermore, this case highlights the disparities between representations and practices of mobility. Although the limitations to the road traffic are heralded as signs of compromise with indigenous communities,

³⁵ Da Silva Oliveira, Rafael. “As Transformações Na Organização Espacial Do Estado De Roraima: Uma Conversa Inicial a Partir Da BR-174.” *Revista Acta Geográfica* 1 (2007): 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.5654/actageo2007.0101.0003>.

³⁶ Silveira, Isolda Maciel da, and Marcelo Gatti. “Notas Sobre a Ocupação De Roraima, Migração e Colonização.” *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi, Série Antropologia* 4, no. 1 (1988): 43–64. <https://repositorio.museu-goeldi.br/handle/mgoeldi/467>.

³⁷ Glick Schiller, Nina, and Andreas Wimmer. “Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and The Social Sciences.” *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (October 2002): 189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043>.

³⁸ Da Silva Oliveira, Rafael. “As Transformações Na Organização Espacial Do Estado De Roraima: Uma Conversa Inicial a Partir Da BR-174.” *Revista Acta Geográfica* 1 (2007): 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.5654/actageo2007.0101.0003>.

the embodied reality of these rules is likely very immobile, as the rule excuses one of the key channels of colonial movement.

The retreat of the military dictatorship in 1985 led to a period of transition that resulted in the administrative and structural condition that the state of Roraima largely finds itself in today. Firstly, the democratization of the country, including the passage of a new constitution in 1988, triggered a fragmented process of municipal emancipation, meaning that the former Federal Territories would no longer operate under the federal government and that the former colonial settlements around the BR-174 would become municipalities. However, these municipalities had no conditions to successfully manage this emancipation, leading in part to the current “abrupt chasm” that has come to exist between the capital city of Boa Vista and the remaining municipalities in Roraima.³⁹ In addition, the administrations of the early 1990s focused on targeting and eradicating the extensive *garimpo* of the previous decades, especially in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio-92). As a result, many *garimpeiros* and agricultural settlers in Roraima migrated to Venezuela, after which some also preceded to Guyana and Suriname in search of other *garimpos*. Beyond being one of the first moments of extensive colonial mobility across the border, this movement once again triggered a series of conflicts and massacres of indigenous peoples.⁴⁰

Despite the decline in these agricultural and mining colonial projects, the democratization period marked a shift from treating Roraima as a boundary, characterized by division, towards treating it as a border, characterized by international connection and traffic. In the midst of

³⁹ Da Silva Oliveira, Rafael. “As Transformações Na Organização Espacial Do Estado De Roraima: Uma Conversa Inicial a Partir Da BR-174.” *Revista Acta Geográfica* 1 (2007): 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.5654/actageo2007.0101.0003>.

⁴⁰ Silva Barros, Pedro. “Roraima: Crescimento Sustentado Pelas Sanções Dos EUA à Venezuela.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 14, 2021. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2021/01/roraima-crescimento-sustentado-pelas-sancoes-dos-eua-a-venezuela.shtml>.

migration out of the state, the governments of Itamar Franco (1992-1994) in Brazil and Rafael Caldera (1994-1998) in Venezuela developed a stronger diplomatic relationship and agenda, articulated through the Protocolo de La Guzmania. In addition to paving and connecting the BR-174 with the Troncal 10, the Venezuelan side of the highway, the protocol also connected Boa Vista to the Bajo Caroní hydroelectric plants in Venezuela with Boa Vista.⁴¹ As such, Roraima is the only state in Brazil not connected to the national electricity grid, primarily dependent on Venezuela to supply its energy.⁴² These actions, however, once again reinforce the colonial forms of connection and occupation in the region, as attempts to lay the power line from the Guri dam to Boa Vista led to protests from and conflicts with indigenous communities along the border.⁴³ Nonetheless, the governments were able to successfully lay the lines in 2001⁴⁴, and the positive relationship between the two countries continued through the 2000s, as Presidents Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil expanded commercial exchange at a national level.⁴⁵ In fact, at one point, Chávez affirmed that Venezuela could act as the main supplier of gas and diesel for the state energy company in Roraima and argued in favor of keeping the border open at all times, though neither of these ended up materializing.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Silva Barros, Pedro. “Roraima: Crescimento Sustentado Pelas Sanções Dos EUA à Venezuela.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 14, 2021. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2021/01/roraima-crescimento-sustentado-pelas-sancoes-dos-eua-a-venezuela.shtml>.

⁴² “Tanques Chegam a Santa Elena e Maduro Fecha a Fronteira.” *Folha de Boa Vista*, February 22, 2019. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/POLITICA/Roraima/Tanques-chegam-a-Santa-Elena-e-Maduro-fecha-a-fronteira/50238>.

⁴³ “Venezuelan Government, Indigenous Groups Clash Over Power Lines.” *Latin America Data Base*, August 28, 1998. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=13541&context=notisur>

⁴⁴ Barbosa da Silva, Altiva. “Geopolítica Na Fronteira Norte Do Brasil: o Papel Das Forças Armadas Nas Transformações Sócio-Espaciais Do Estado De Roraima,” 2007. <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8136/tde-28052010-102349-pt-br.php>.

⁴⁵ Silva Barros, Pedro. “Roraima: Crescimento Sustentado Pelas Sanções Dos EUA à Venezuela.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 14, 2021. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2021/01/roraima-crescimento-sustentado-pelas-sancoes-dos-eua-a-venezuela.shtml>.

⁴⁶ Barbosa da Silva, Altiva. “Geopolítica Na Fronteira Norte Do Brasil: o Papel Das Forças Armadas Nas Transformações Sócio-Espaciais Do Estado De Roraima,” 2007. <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8136/tde-28052010-102349-pt-br.php>.

As signs of economic trouble began to manifest in Venezuela prior to the onset of the current crisis, ranging roughly from 2005 to 2015, the border became a place of extensive informal and reciprocal commerce. Venezuelans would cross the border to buy food, medicine, and other products that were unavailable or too expensive in Venezuela, while Brazilians would cross to buy the extremely cheap gasoline its neighboring country had to offer. While the latter was once the main form of mobility in the region, the former has expressively emerged as the dominant movement along the border since the onset of the crisis in the mid-2010s.⁴⁷

Although many of the specific details I have included in this chapter may appear superfluous to comprehending the current migratory patterns between the two countries, I want to underscore that Roraima and Venezuela have constituted one another in terms of mobility and immobility for decades now. The mere existence of connections and movement through and between these regions is not novel. Specifically, the informal border exchanges that I just described are critical to understanding the changes in this dynamic that I will describe in subsequent chapters. Additionally, this history underscores the ways in which migration itself often occurs in relation to questions of mobility, as the colonial settlers often abandoned certain areas in favor of others with channels of mobility. Finally, the colonial history of all of these historical occurrences, which often entail the displacing and genocide of indigenous communities, illustrates how mobility has different implications for different groups. Historicizing these forms of structural violence will then provide more context and clarity for the indigenous-focused questions I will address in subsequent chapters.

⁴⁷ Silva Barros, Pedro. “Roraima: Crescimento Sustentado Pelas Sanções Dos EUA à Venezuela.” Folha de S.Paulo, January 14, 2021. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2021/01/roraima-crescimento-sustentado-pelas-sancoes-dos-eua-a-venezuela.shtml>.

Chapter III: Roraima as a deterritorialized zone of migration

In this chapter, I will expand on the ways in which the Brazilian mobility regime in the state of Roraima has largely enabled and worked to facilitate mobility of Venezuelan migrants into the national territory over the past several years. First, I will explore the motive forces that have triggered this influx of migrants over the past five years. In doing so, I will highlight the ways in which this mobility is not necessarily new to the region, but rather has experienced a unidirectional intensification in recent years. Secondly, I will describe issues related to the velocity and routes of these flows in order to understand the actions taken by the Brazilian state and other agents in the mobility regime to facilitate these flows. Beyond giving a high-level overview of the coordinated response to the influx, exploring these issues will demonstrate the ways in which the border itself has become a relatively deterritorialized zone, characterized as an area of widely unrestricted and frictionless mobility. However, given the dialectical relationship between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, this sets the stage for reterritorializing border practices to sprout up in other localities and by other, supra-national agents (which I will detail in Section IV). Finally, by exploring the rhythms and routes of these flows, I will reaffirm the new mobilities scholars' understanding of migration as a non-linear trajectory that adapts to the migrant's needs and the mobility regime.

From Venezuela to Brazil

To begin, it is crucial to highlight the factors that have contributed to the mass exodus of Venezuelans throughout the region, in order to understand the modalities of and responses to this movement. The evolution of the crisis is incredibly complicated, as it has resulted from the

intersection of several distinct, but interrelated factors, including “political turmoil, socio-economic instability and [an] ongoing humanitarian crisis.”⁴⁸ Although migrants have been emigrating from Venezuela since the early 2000s during the Chávez administration, Venezuelans began to feel the exacerbation of the crisis in a more generalized sense beginning in 2015 during the subsequent Maduro administration. First of all, it was around this time that the economy began to plummet, as hyperinflation of the bolivar (the national currency) made it increasingly difficult to afford necessities. For instance, according to the Café con Leche Index developed by Bloomberg⁴⁹, the cost of a cup of coffee was 1,800 times as high in January 2019 as January of the previous year.⁵⁰ Grocery stores, as well, often lack sufficient stocks of food and products, leading 8 out of 10 Venezuelans to have to reduce their food intake in some capacity.⁵¹ Secondly, public and social services throughout the country have fallen into an incredibly precarious state. One study found that 78 percent of hospitals reported shortages of medicine⁵², and people who require operations often must purchase their own medical supplies, in addition to the already inflated healthcare costs.⁵³ Similarly, access to electricity is unstable, as both outages and power surges have become more common.⁵⁴ Finally, in addition to increased levels of violence born out of this desperation⁵⁵, political persecution and violence has grown since 2016, following protests

⁴⁸ “Venezuelan Refugee and Migrant Crisis.” International Organization for Migration, May 15, 2020. <https://www.iom.int/venezuela-refugee-and-migrant-crisis>.

⁴⁹ “Venezuelan Café Con Leche Index.” Bloomberg.com. Bloomberg, December 15, 2016. <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-venezuela-cafe-con-leche-index/>.

⁵⁰ Wanless, Jess. “Why Are Venezuelans Leaving Their Country?” International Rescue Committee (IRC), January 17, 2019. <https://www.rescue.org/article/why-are-venezuelans-leaving-their-country>.

⁵¹ Ramsey, Geoff, and Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli. Washington Office on Latin America, 2018, Responding to an Exodus: Venezuela’s Migration and Refugee Crisis as Seen From the Colombian and Brazilian Borders, www.wola.org/analysis/responding-exodus-venezuelas-migration-refugee-crisis-seen-colombian-brazilian-borders/

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Wanless, Jess. “Why Are Venezuelans Leaving Their Country?” International Rescue Committee (IRC), January 17, 2019. <https://www.rescue.org/article/why-are-venezuelans-leaving-their-country>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

against a series of actions taken by the Maduro administration to consolidate their power.⁵⁶ Specifically, the government began ordering violent repression of street protests, imprisoning political opponents, prosecuting civilians in military courts, and harassing human rights defenders.⁵⁷ Although these factors do not always qualify Venezuelan migrants for refugee status based on national or international definitions, the political, economic, and humanitarian collapse of the country does indeed qualify the subsequent exodus as a “forced migration.”⁵⁸

In fact, the flight of Venezuelans, predominantly within Latin America, has come to represent one of the largest instances of forced migration in the past several years, being second only to the Syrian refugee crisis.⁵⁹ Figure 3 displays the stock of migrants throughout the region as of March 2020. At this time, estimates placed the total number of Venezuelans in the

⁵⁶ Alvim, Mariana. “A Cronologia Da Crise Migratória Em Pacaraima, Na Fronteira Entre Brasil e Venezuela.” BBC News Brasil, August 20, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-45242682>.

⁵⁷ “World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Venezuela.” Human Rights Watch, January 14, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/venezuela#>.

⁵⁸ Selee, Andrew and Jessica Bolter. Migration Policy Institute, 2020, An Uneven Welcome: Latin American and Caribbean Responses to Venezuelan and Nicaraguan Migration, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Venezuela-Nicaragua-Migration2020-EN-Final.pdf>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Figure 3: Distribution of Venezuelan migrants throughout Latin America⁶⁰



⁶⁰ “Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.” Situation Response for Venezuelans. Accessed April 6, 2021. <https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform>.

world at just underneath 5 million, with 4 million of these estimated to be living within the Latin America and the Caribbean.⁶¹ As seen in the figure, the greatest numbers of migrants have fled to neighboring Spanish-speaking country, including Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. Although Brazil initially was not the preferred destination for most Venezuelans, likely due to linguistic differences and the lack of economic prospects in Roraima, it has come to receive the fifth largest contingent of migrants over the past several years.⁶² In addition to the fact that Brazil has greatly facilitated Venezuelan access to the national territory and social services (which I will discuss later), it also represents one of the few viable options available to migrants with limited resources to go further than a neighboring country.⁶³

The logistics of crossing

The journey into Brazil is oftentimes a rigorous and draining experience. Given the socioeconomic nature of the factors pushing many migrants to flee Venezuela and seek refuge or residency in Brazil, the majority of crossings occur by land at the border.⁶⁴ The only legal point of entry along the border between Venezuela and Brazil is located in the municipality of Pacaraima, in the northernmost state of Roraima, as depicted in Figure 4.⁶⁵ In order to make the journey to Brazil, migrants must first arrive in the Venezuelan state of Bolívar, the

⁶¹ “R4V Latin America and the Caribbean, Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in the Region.” UNHCR Response for Venezuelans (R4V), March 6, 2020. <https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/details/74432>.

⁶² Jiménez, Carla. “La Odisea De Los Venezolanos Que Se Convirtieron En Ciudadanos Brasileños.” EL PAÍS, December 20, 2020. <https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-12-19/la-odisea-de-los-venezolanos-que-se-convirtieron-en-ciudadanos-brasilenos.html>.

⁶³ Ramsey, Geoff, and Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli. Washington Office on Latin America, 2018, Responding to an Exodus: Venezuela’s Migration and Refugee Crisis as Seen From the Colombian and Brazilian Borders, www.wola.org/analysis/responding-exodus-venezuelas-migration-refugee-crisis-seen-colombian-brazilian-borders/

⁶⁴ Smolansky, David. Rep. Situación De Los Migrantes y Refugiados Venezolanos En Brasil. Organization of American States, December 12, 2019. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-031/19.

⁶⁵ Kanaan, Cel, and Maj Tassio. “As ações do exército brasileiro na ajuda humanitária aos imigrantes venezuelanos.” Essay. In Migrações Venezuelanas, 68-71. Nepo/Unicamp, 2018. Brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf.

Figure 4: Main cities along the Venezuela-Brazil Border⁶⁶



southeastern state that borders Brazil. In order to reach this rather remote region of the country, the trajectory for migrants coming from other regions is often rather improvised and haphazard, consisting of primarily of hitchhiking and finding inexpensive bus passes.⁶⁷ Once they reach Santa Elena de Uairén, the border city on the Venezuelan side, they must precede about 20 kilometers along the Troncal 10/BR-174 to reach the official post of entry in Pacaraima.⁶⁸ Migrants are able to do so both by car (oftentimes paying someone to give them a ride), by bus, or by foot. Oftentimes, the bus or car services drop them off right at the border, choosing not to

⁶⁶ “Venezuelanos No Brasil.” O Globo, September 3, 2016.

<http://especiais.g1.globo.com/rr/roraima/2016/venezuelanos-no-brasil/>.

⁶⁷ Thomas, Jennifer Ann. “Fuga de uma ditadura: a saga dos venezuelanos no Brasil.” VEJA, August 2, 2019.

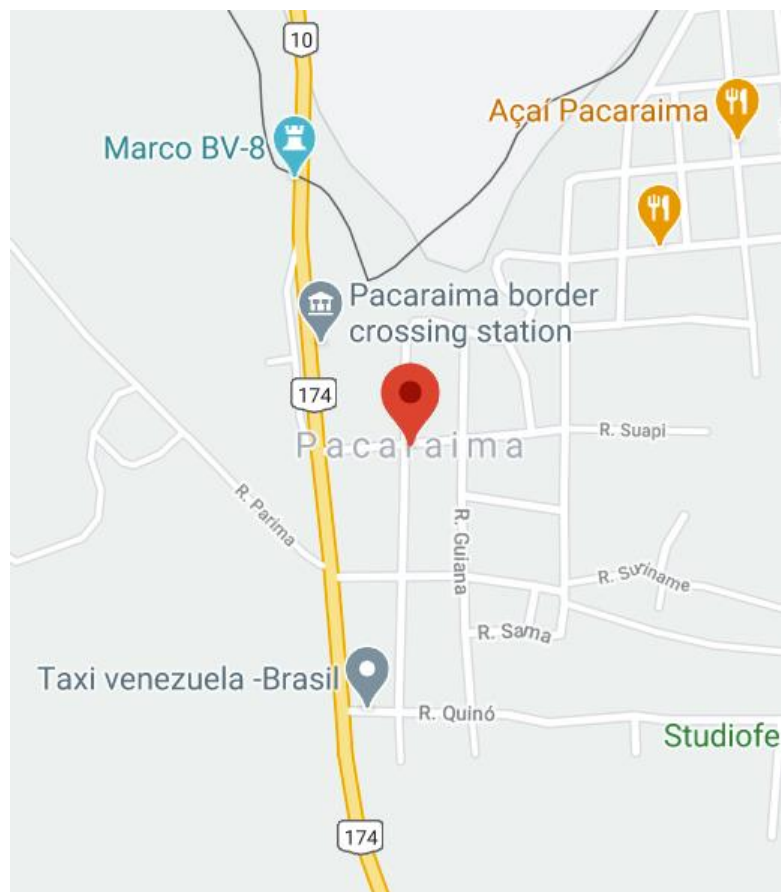
<https://veja.abril.com.br/mundo/fuga-de-uma-ditadura-a-saga-dos-venezuelanos-no-brasil/>

⁶⁸ “Em Busca De Acolhimento.” VEJA. Accessed March 22, 2021.

<https://complemento.veja.abril.com.br/mundo/em-busca-de-acolhimento/>.

cross unless the migrants are willing to pay extra.⁶⁹ The border itself does not consist of any major infrastructure, but rather migrants are able to freely cross and continue along the BR-174 until arriving at a border crossing outpost set up by the Federal Police. From there, depending on the migrant's purpose for entering the country, they may be directed to the federal government's border infrastructure for processing or may continue their journey along the BR-174. Figure 5 maps the procession from the border, marked by the "Marco BV-8", until the government's post of entry, labeled "Pacaraima border crossing station." Figure 6 shows what this looks like in actuality. I will go into more detail concerning the government's processing of migrants at the

Figure 5: Map of the official path to enter Pacaraima from Venezuela⁷⁰



⁶⁹ Thomas, Jennifer Ann. "Fuga de uma ditadura: a saga dos venezuelanos no Brasil." VEJA, August 2, 2019. <https://veja.abril.com.br/mundo/fuga-de-uma-ditadura-a-saga-dos-venezuelanos-no-brasil/>

⁷⁰ Screenshot taken from Google Maps

Figure 6: Image of the official path to enter Pacaraima from Venezuela⁷¹



border in the next section. For many migrants, however, Pacaraima is not the final destination on their route, as the capital city of Boa Vista offers greater potential, capacity, and access to other regions.

Migrants subsequently must continue along the BR-174, often facing hunger, thirst, and exhaustion because of the lack of services and infrastructure along the path, as they aim to reach Boa Vista. The journey from Pacaraima to Boa Vista, pictured in Figure 7, is approximately 216 kilometers, over ten times the distance needed to cross from Santa Elena de Uairén into

⁷¹ *Fuga Para a Liberdade: a Saga Dos Venezuelanos No Brasil*. YouTube. VEJA, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMBUtl09gKA&t=325s>.

Figure 7: Map of the segment of the BR-174 running through Roraima⁷²

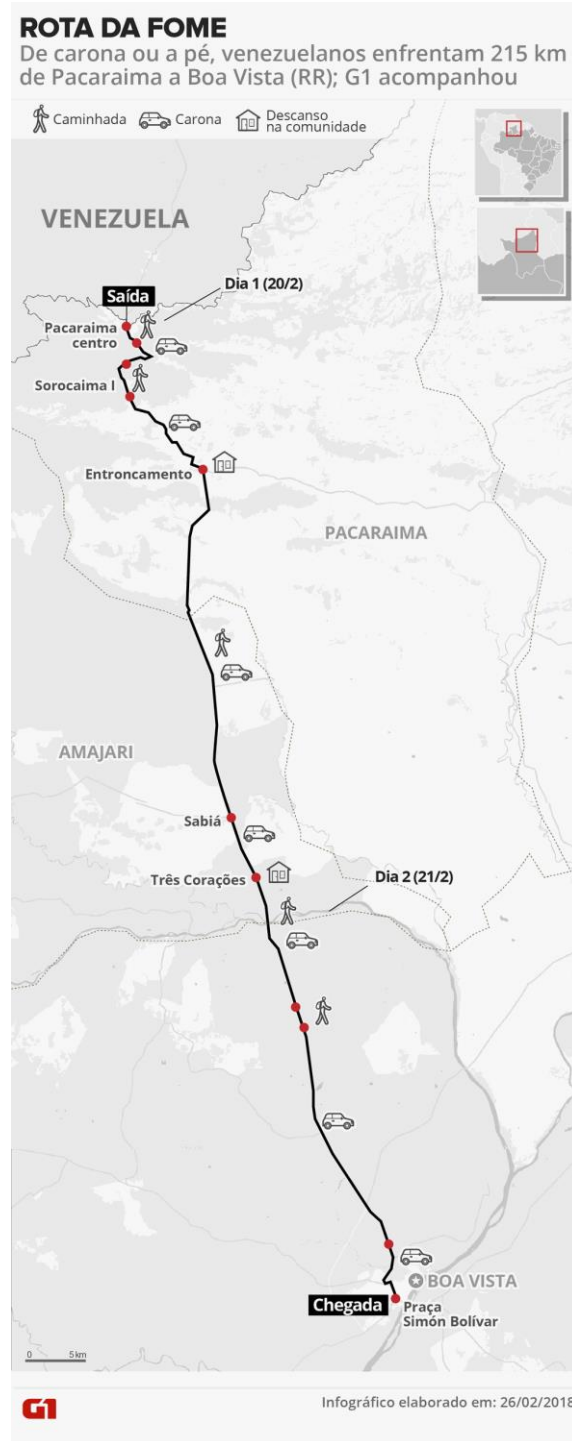


Pacaraima. Although a bus service operates regularly between the two cities, the passes (often costing between R\$30 and R\$50) are too expensive for many migrants, leading them once again to find alternative means of transportation, whether walking, finding a car, or some combination of these. Many do not realize the length of the journey. For those who receive some type of assistance along the way, they can get there in two or three days. For those who have to walk the entire distance day and night, it takes four or five days. For those who only walk during the day, it can take up to 10 days.⁷³ Figure 8 displays an example of what this journey may entail. For

⁷² Louzada, Jaime, et al. "The Impact of Imported Malaria by Gold Miners in Roraima: Characterizing the Spatial Dynamics of Autochthonous and Imported Malaria in an Urban Region of Boa Vista." *Memórias do Instituto Oswaldo Cruz* 115 (2020): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0074-02760200043>.

⁷³ Costa, Emily, and Inaê Brandão. "Rota Da Fome: o Caminho Dos Venezuelanos Que Enfrentam Perigo, Falta De Comida e De Água Para Chegar a Boa Vista." *G1*, March 2, 2018. <https://g1.globo.com/rr/roraima/noticia/rota-da-fome-o-caminho-dos-venezuelanos-que-enfrentam-perigo-falta-de-comida-e-de-agua-para-chegar-a-boa-vista.ghtml>.

Figure 8: Map of the route migrants take from the border to Boa Vista⁷⁴



⁷⁴ Costa, Emily, and Inaê Brandão. "Rota Da Fome: o Caminho Dos Venezuelanos Que Enfrentam Perigo, Falta De Comida e De Água Para Chegar a Boa Vista." G1, March 2, 2018. <https://g1.globo.com/rr/roraima/noticia/rota-da-fome-o-caminho-dos-venezuelanos-que-enfrentam-perigo-falta-de-comida-e-de-agua-para-chegar-a-boja-vista.ghtml>.

many, their journey ends upon arriving at the aptly named Praça Simón Bolívar on Avenida Venezuela, where they often agglomerate while waiting to begin their legal regularization or receive medical treatment or other humanitarian services.⁷⁵ Migrants, however, are not alone in this journey, as several agents from different sectors of society have mobilized to respond to and support the recent influx of Venezuelans into the country. In the next two sections, I will further explore the ways the mobility regime influences these routes.

Operação Acolhida: designations of official channels of mobility

The response of the federal government of Brazil has constituted one of the most salient elements of the mobility regime that operates at the border with Venezuela. In February of 2018, by means of Provisional Measure N. 820, the federal government announced the birth of *Operação Acolhida* (Operation Welcome), a task force charged with responding to the influx of migrants, and its concomitant Federal Committee of Emergency Assistance. The operation aims to integrate Venezuelan migrants and refugees into Brazilian society and reestablish the welfare and security of the state of Roraima. Although the task force is officially led by the Casa Civil (the office of the presidency), it relies on the participation of 10 federal ministries, the coordination of the armed forces, and the cooperation of more than 100 civil society and international organizations, such as the IOM and UNHCR.⁷⁶ In fact, Brazil's response has been considered one of the best in the region due to this "synergy of efforts that unite agencies from

⁷⁵ Costa, Emily, and Inaê Brandão. "Rota Da Fome: o Caminho Dos Venezuelanos Que Enfrentam Perigo, Falta De Comida e De Água Para Chegar a Boa Vista." G1, March 2, 2018. <https://g1.globo.com/rr/roraima/noticia/rota-da-fome-o-caminho-dos-venezuelanos-que-enfrentam-perigo-falta-de-comida-e-de-agua-para-chegar-a-boa-vista.ghtml>.

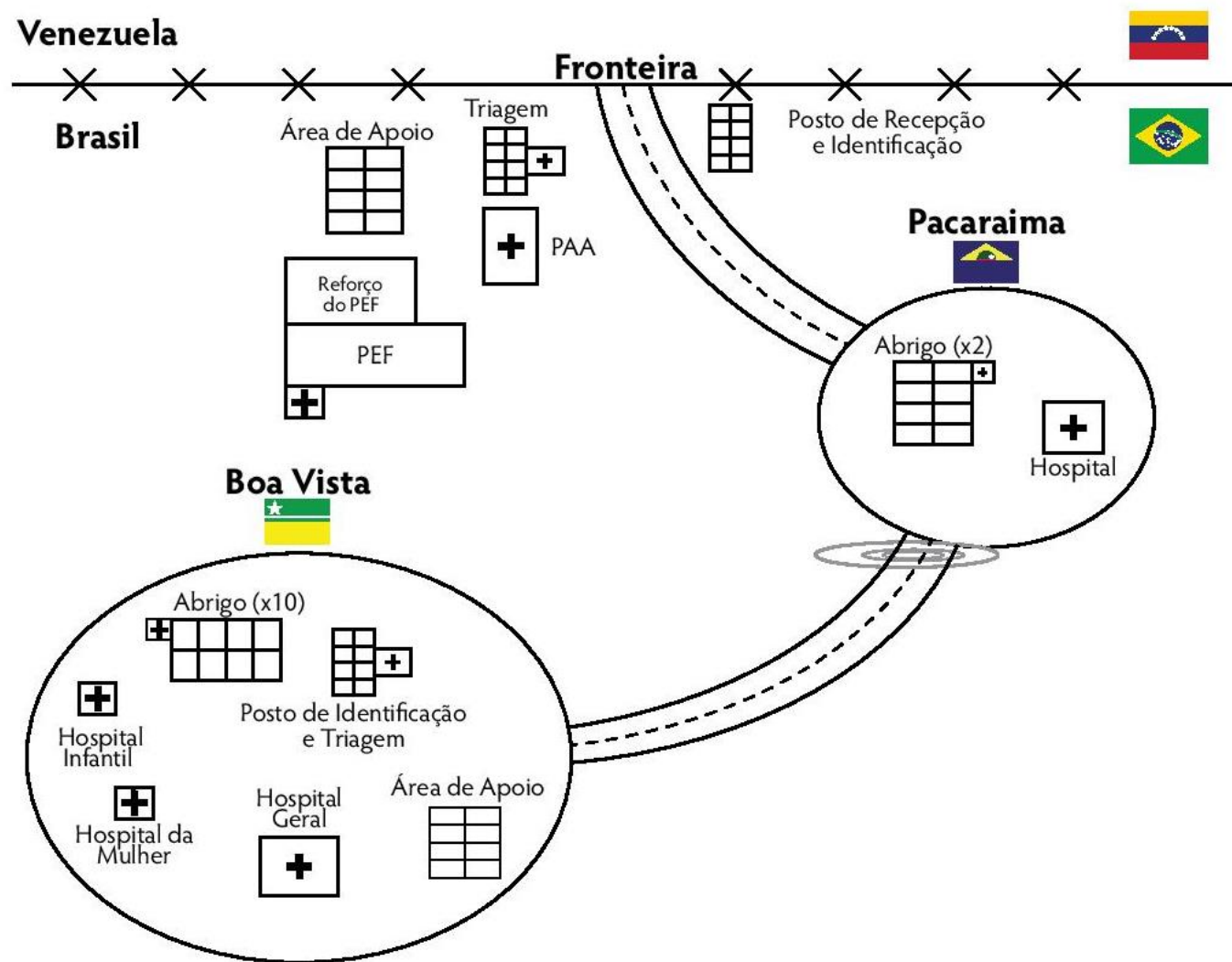
⁷⁶ Smolansky, David. Rep. Situación De Los Migrantes y Refugiados Venezolanos En Brasil. Organization of American States, December 12, 2019. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-031/19.

the United Nations, Brazilian army, civil society, and governments.”⁷⁷ *Operação Acolhida* focuses its efforts into three main phases: reception and border planning, sheltering, and interiorization.

As indicated by the new mobilities scholars, because mobility is always located and materialized, these efforts have entailed changes to the materiality of the border region, with the construction of infrastructure to facilitate this movement, while also designating appropriate and legal forms of mobility. As previously described, the main and official pathway connecting Venezuela and Brazil is the BR-174/Troncal 10, where key federal agents including the Federal Police and the army have established and operate such infrastructure. As shown in Figure 9,

⁷⁷ Smolansky, David. Rep. Situación De Los Migrantes y Refugiados Venezolanos En Brasil. Organization of American States, December 12, 2019. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-031/19.

Figure 9: Diagram of the government infrastructure on the Brazilian side of the border⁷⁸



the first point of contact that migrants face upon entering the country via this route is the Reception and Identification Post (*Posto de Recepção e Identificação*, in the figure), the name for the previously mentioned border crossing station operated by the Federal Police. In this post, migrants are able to fill out entrance permits (if they do not have a valid passport), pass through

⁷⁸ Garcia de Oliveira, Maj George Alberto. "A Utilização Do Componente Militar Brasileiro Frente à Crise Migratória Da Venezuela." *Military Review*, November 2018. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/edicao-brasileira/artigos-exclusivamente-on-line/artigos-exclusivamente-on-line-de-2018/a-utilizacao-do-componente-militar-brasileiro-frente-a-crise-migratoria/>.

migration control with the Federal Police, and receive vaccinations.⁷⁹ Then, migrants are able to proceed to the Screening Post (*Triagem*, in the figure), where they receive an orientation concerning the different migratory statuses, submit documentation and requests to the Federal Police, and receive a CPF (a Brazilian form of identification) and work permits. Finally, those with documentation still being processed or in vulnerable situations are able to seek help and medical treatment in the Social Care Post (*PAA*, in the figure) and can stay in the BV-8 shelter (*Abrigo*, in the figure) located in Pacaraima.⁸⁰ This shelter, however, is destined for those migrants who are unable to make the journey to Boa Vista or are in particularly vulnerable conditions, and is meant to be a transitory option, as it often limits migrants to stays of less than three months.⁸¹ Migrants can access all of these same services (e.g., legal documentation and access to medical attention) in Boa Vista, which has all of these same posts, but at a greater capacity. Figure 10 and 11 map the ideal flow of migrants through both cities. Notably, despite

⁷⁹ Smolansky, David. Rep. Situación De Los Migrantes y Refugiados Venezolanos En Brasil. Organization of American States, December 12, 2019. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-031/19.

⁸⁰ Freitas de Castro Chaves, João. “Panorama da resposta humanitária ao fluxo venezuelano no Brasil na perspectiva da defensoria pública da união.” Essay. In *Migrações Venezuelanas*, 93-100. Nepo/Unicamp, 2018. [Brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf](https://brasil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf).

⁸¹ “Em Busca De Acolhimento.” VEJA. Accessed March 22, 2021. <https://complemento.veja.abril.com.br/mundo/em-busca-de-acolhimento/>.

Figure 10: Flow diagram of government processing of Venezuelan migrants in Pacaraima⁸²

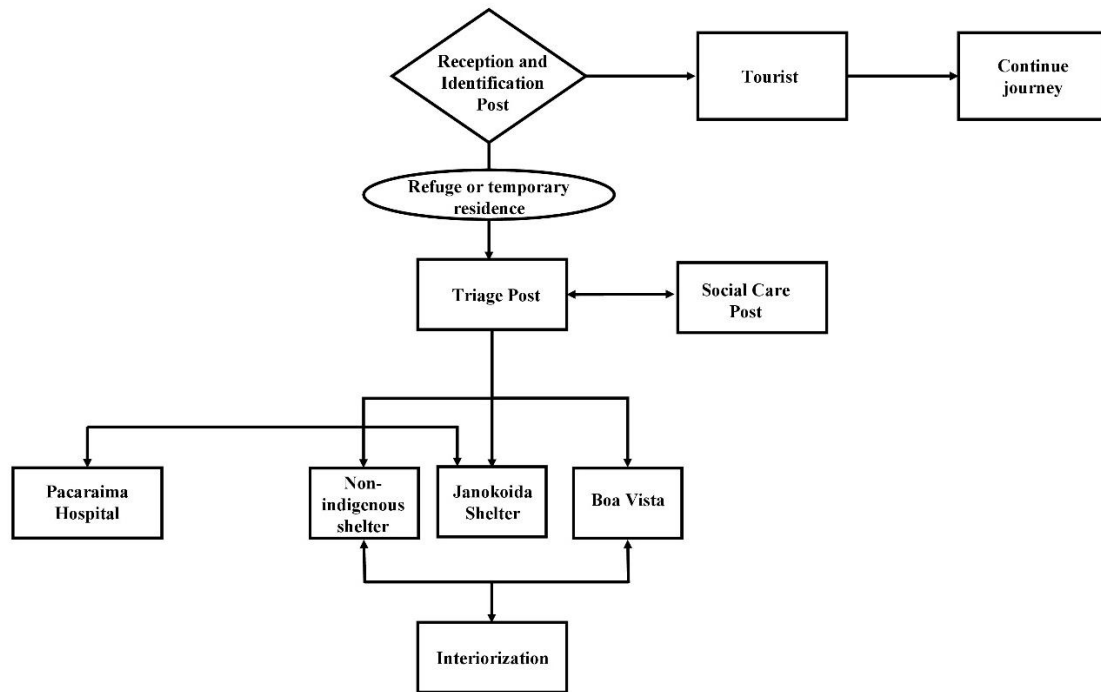
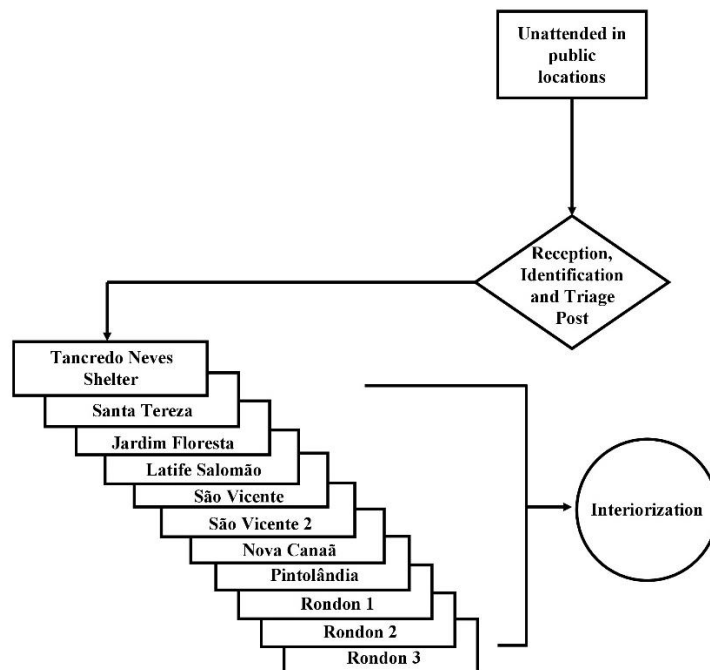


Figure 11: Flow diagram of government processing of Venezuelan migrants in Boa Vista⁸³



⁸² “Relatório Trimestral: Comitê Federal de Assistência Emergencial.” Casa Civil, May 2018.

⁸³ Ibid.

the military presence at the border (which I will explore further in Section Four), almost all of the infrastructure that has been constructed aims to facilitate and expedite flows, without any major form of barrier or blockage.

The legalities of crossing

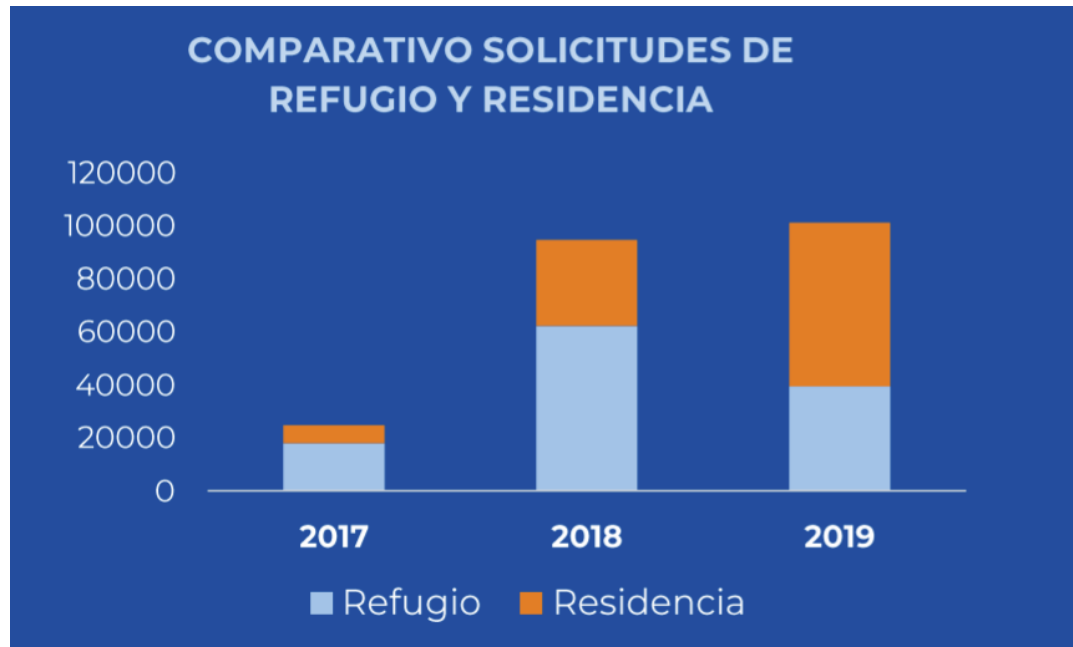
Beyond the physical infrastructure itself, the legal framework that regularizes these migrants has largely aimed to produce a national space characterized by flows, eliminating barriers to entrance and integration in social and economic systems. Firstly, according to Brazilian Law N. 9,474/97 and its adoption of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, Venezuelan migrants have the possibility to seek refuge upon entering the country.⁸⁴ However, it can be difficult to concede refuge to Venezuelans, as these pieces of legislation define refugees in political terms as individuals fleeing persecution or threats. For those who have been displaced due to economic precarity, the case for refuge under Brazilian law becomes significantly weaker.⁸⁵ Consequently, the Brazilian government passed the Ministerial Ordinance N. 09/2018, which offers Venezuelans (and citizens of all other bordering countries) authorization for temporary residency, which could potentially transition into permanent residency after its two-year duration. The resolution extends all the same rights offered to Brazilian citizens to holders of this authorization, including access to the public health system and social support programs such as Bolsa Familia, for which reason it has come to be referred to as the humanitarian visa.⁸⁶ Figure 12 highlights the change in requests for each of these statuses over time. The

⁸⁴ Smolansky, David. Rep. Situación De Los Migrantes y Refugiados Venezolanos En Brasil. Organization of American States, December 12, 2019. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-031/19.

⁸⁵ Sanches, Mariana. “Governo Federal Concede Visto Humanitário a Venezuelanos.” O Globo, February 22, 2017. <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/governo-federal-concede-visto-humanitario-venezuelanos-20964114>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Figure 12: Comparison in applications for refuge and temporary residency⁸⁷



humanitarian visa of this type had only been offered once before, for Haitian migrants following the earthquake in 2010. Unlike before, however, there is no upper limit to the number of visas granted each year, the visa can be requested in Brazil (as opposed to the country of origin), and the list of required documents is shorter.⁸⁸ Of course, the concession of visas and refugee status are legal designations that do not necessarily actually facilitate or impede flows themselves (though the promise of easy paths to residency could serve as a motive force to migrants); rather, they determine the extent to which migrants are subject to the “criminalizing and entrapping” functions of the mobility regime.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Smolansky, David. Rep. Situación De Los Migrantes y Refugiados Venezolanos En Brasil. Organization of American States, December 12, 2019. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-031/19.

⁸⁸ Sanches, Mariana. “Governo Federal Concede Visto Humanitário a Venezuelanos.” O Globo, February 22, 2017. <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/governo-federal-concede-visto-humanitario-venezuelanos-20964114>.

⁸⁹ Wimmer, Andreas, and Nina Glick Schiller. “Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences.” *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043>.

Similarly, the federal government and state agents have taken several measures to address and resolve issues that have contributed to bottlenecks in the migratory process. In 2018, for instance, the state government of Roraima submitted a decree to increase the security and inspection conducted at the border and restricting their access to public services by requiring a valid passport. The former measure would have created longer wait times for service at the border, while the latter would have expelled many migrants from the public services (such as medical treatment) at the border, as the majority arrive at the border without documents.⁹⁰ Almost immediately, however, the Federal Supreme Court (STF) struck the decree down, as the power to regulate border control lies with the federal government.⁹¹ Similarly, prior to the deployment of *Operação Acolhida*, the quantity of migrants arriving at the border was well beyond their capacity, leading to extremely long wait times at the border and long bureaucratic processing times. In response, they not only recruited an impromptu task force of civil society volunteers and public servants, but they also began emitting a “juridically questionable” but highly efficient system of scheduling refuge requests. As a result, the average time from initial service to the submission of refuge requests dropped from six months to fifteen days between 2016 and 2017.⁹² Finally, upon recognizing the backlog in asylum cases, (in addition to adding the previously described humanitarian visa), the federal government expanded its definition of

⁹⁰ Toledo, Marcelo. “Após 15 Horas Fechada, Fronteira Com a Venezuela é Reaberta Em Roraima.” Folha de S.Paulo, August 7, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/apos-15-horas-fechada-fronteira-com-a-venezuela-e-reaberta-em-roraima.shtml>.

⁹¹ Tuollo, Reynaldo. “Ministra Do STF Suspende Decreto Que Restringia Serviços Para Venezuelanos.” Folha de S.Paulo, August 8, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/ministra-do-stf-suspende-decreto-que-restringia-servicos-para-venezuelanos.shtml>.

⁹² Dos Santos Vasconcelos, Iana, and Sandro Martins de Almeida Santos. “Refugiados em Roraima? Instituições, papéis e a competição pelas categorias.” Essay. In *Migrações Venezuelanas*, 250-256. Nepo/Unicamp, 2018. [Brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf](https://brasil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf).

asylum and began granting refugee status on a prime facie basis in 2019⁹³, which removes the need to conduct the long and delayed interviews to determine whether the migrant qualified for temporary residence or refuge.⁹⁴ Consequently, whereas the government only granted asylum to 42 migrants in the first half of 2019, it was able to extend asylum to approximately 26,000 in the second half of the year.⁹⁵ This is not to say that the mobility regime has developed a perfectly agile and boundless space of flows. For instance, as the size of the influx increased following the creation of *Operação Acolhida* and the deepening of the crisis in Venezuela, the agility of these state-sponsored channels still faces challenges, considering long lines and wait times were once again reported at the end of 2019, this time in the Screening Post in Boa Vista.⁹⁶ However, the efforts to combat and reduce these bottlenecks indicates the federal government's recognition of the value of velocity as a resource in processes of mobility.

Furthermore, the shifting materiality within the border region to accommodate these flows extends well beyond the infrastructure established along the paths these migrants follow into the country. Specifically, *Operação Acolhida*'s second phase, known as 'sheltering', consists of constructing and operating shelters with the capacity to hold large numbers of migrants in the cities of Pacaraima and Boa Vista.⁹⁷ Although the first refugee shelter had been constructed in Pacaraima by the municipal government with the support of NGOs several months

⁹³ Selee, Andrew and Jessica Bolter. Migration Policy Institute, 2020, An Uneven Welcome: Latin American and Caribbean Responses to Venezuelan and Nicaraguan Migration, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Venezuela-Nicaragua-Migration2020-EN-Final.pdf>

⁹⁴ Jiménez, Carla. "La Odisea De Los Venezolanos Que Se Convirtieron En Ciudadanos Brasileños." EL PAÍS, December 20, 2020. <https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-12-19/la-odisea-de-los-venezolanos-que-se-convirtieron-en-ciudadanos-brasilenos.html>.

⁹⁵ Selee, Andrew and Jessica Bolter. Migration Policy Institute, 2020, An Uneven Welcome: Latin American and Caribbean Responses to Venezuelan and Nicaraguan Migration, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Venezuela-Nicaragua-Migration2020-EN-Final.pdf>

⁹⁶ Smolansky, David. Rep. Situación De Los Migrantes y Refugiados Venezolanos En Brasil. Organization of American States, December 12, 2019. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-031/19.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

prior to the inauguration of *Operação Acolhida*⁹⁸, the federal backing provided by the operation allowed the total number of shelters to grow to thirteen by 2019, with two in Pacaraima and eleven in Boa Vista. The shelter names and capacities can be seen in Figure 13 and the location of the shelters throughout each city can be seen circled in red in Figures 14 and 15. While in

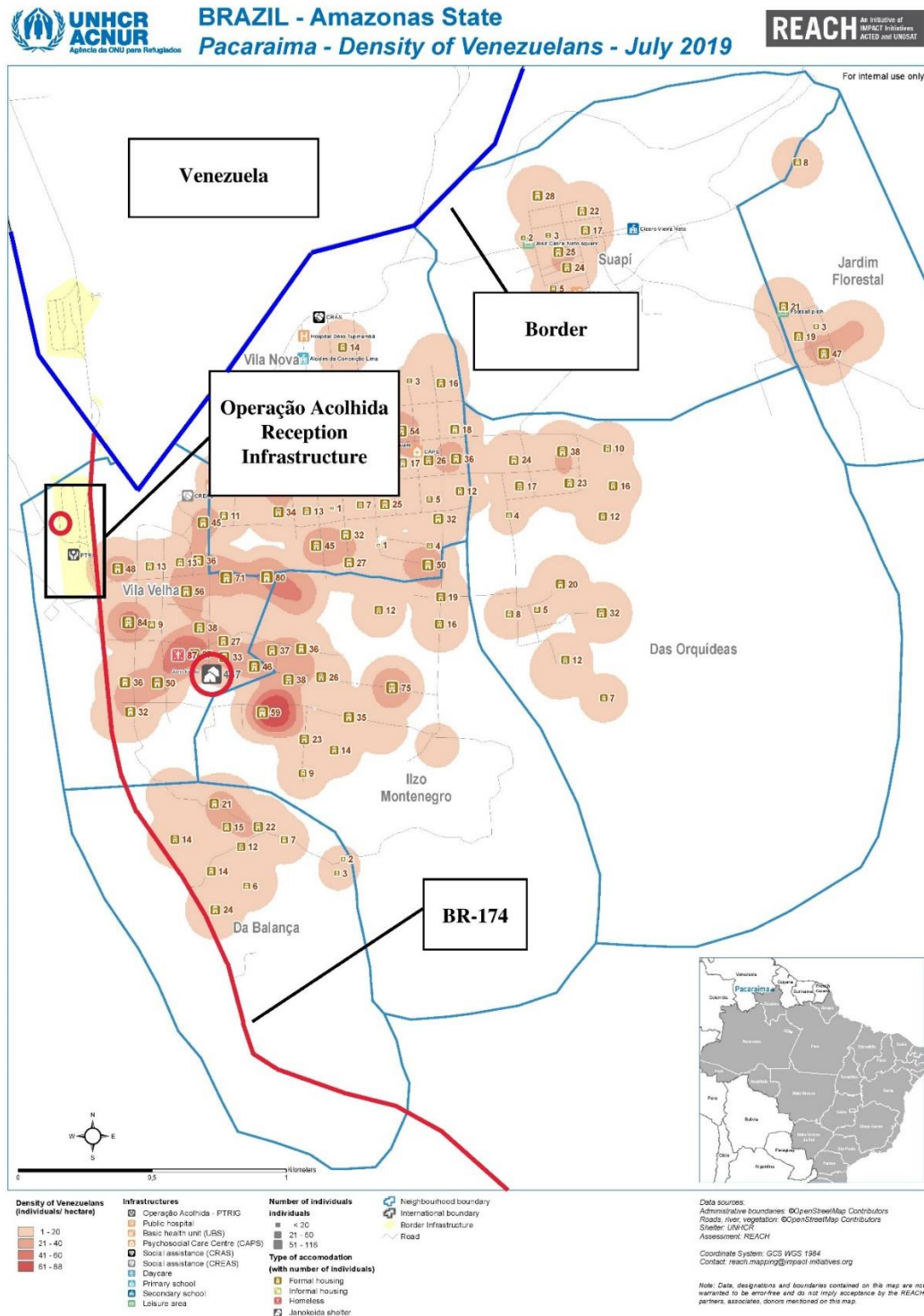
Figure 13: Location, name, and capacity of *Operação Acolhida* shelters⁹⁹

Boa Vista	
Shelter Name	Capacity
Santa Tereza	600
Tancredo Neves	300
Jardim Floresta	600
Latife Salomão	540
São Vicente	320
São Vicente 2	230
Nova Canaã	380
Pintolândia (indigenous-specific shelter)	590
Rondon 1	810
Rondon 2	600
Rondon 3	1080
Pacaraima	
Shelter Name	Capacity
Janokoida (indigenous-specific shelter)	610
BV8 (transitional shelter)	256

⁹⁸ Alvim, Mariana. “A Cronologia Da Crise Migratória Em Pacaraima, Na Fronteira Entre Brasil e Venezuela.” BBC News Brasil, August 20, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-45242682>.

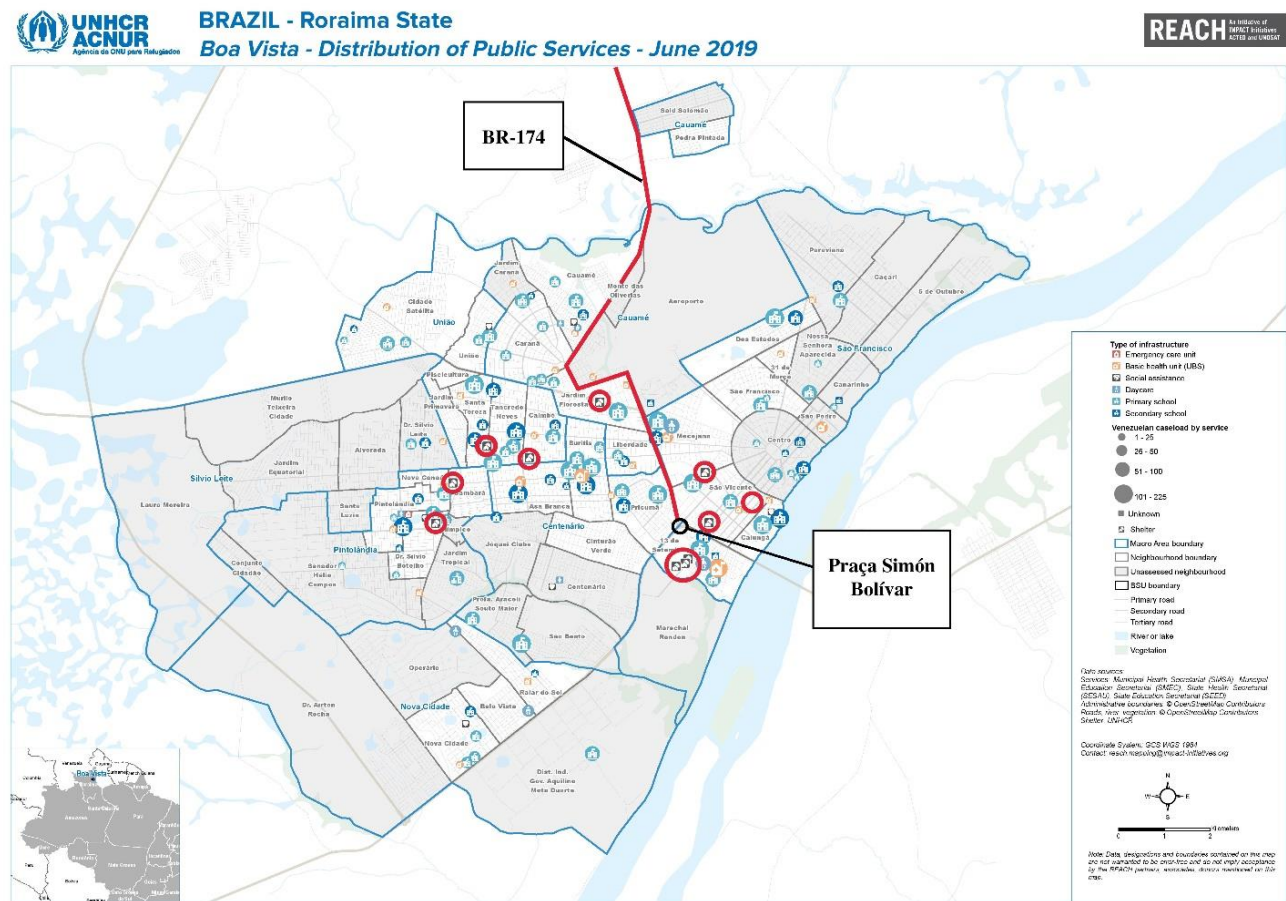
⁹⁹ Smolansky, David. Rep. Situación De Los Migrantes y Refugiados Venezolanos En Brasil. Organization of American States, December 12, 2019. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-031/19.

Figure 14: Map of the government-run shelters and infrastructure in Pacaraima¹⁰⁰



¹⁰⁰ “Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.” Situation Response for Venezuelans. Accessed April 6, 2021. <https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform/location/7509>.

Figure 15: Map of the government-run shelters in Boa Vista¹⁰¹



the shelters, they have access to a wide variety of services, including three meals per day, hygiene products, Portuguese courses, and telephones to call home, among others. Notably, two of the shelters are specifically designated for indigenous communities, with resources and procedures tailored to their practices (such as hammocks instead of beds and raw food materials rather than prepared meals). In this way, the sheltering phase of *Operação Acolhida* highlights how infrastructure often accompanies the designation of official flows of movements by the mobility regime in order to buttress such flows. Nonetheless, this is not to say that the infrastructure is not expansive enough to house and accommodate all of the Venezuelans that

¹⁰¹ “Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.” Situation Response for Venezuelans. Accessed April 6, 2021. <https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform/location/7509>.

find themselves in vulnerable situations in Roraima. For instance, at the end of 2019, the OAS found that 2950 migrants were living in ‘spontaneous occupations’, 997 were living in a space adjacent to the bus terminal, and 425 were living in the street in Boa Vista. Both the establishment of an extensive network of shelters and the occupation of public spaces represent a dramatic shift in the constitution of Pacaraima and Boa Vista, as they previously had little infrastructure and a small local population. In a more general sense, the transformation of these cities—both through the border reception and sheltering phases—highlights the ways in which places are constituted by the human mobilities that run through them, thus supporting the new mobilities scholars’ rejection of ontologies separating people and places.

The mobility regime beyond the state: diverse modalities of motion

Much of the previously described infrastructure aims to channel migrant mobility through what I will call the ‘official channel’, involving the parties designated by *Operação Acolhida* to aid in the response. However, the true reality of the mobility that the mobility regime has sanctioned throughout this region covers much more than this linear, unidirectional channel composed of civil society organizations, international organizations, and the government. Despite the intense focus on *Operação Acolhida* as the primary element of interest when discussing Venezuelan migration in Brazil, several other agents participate in and constitute this response, thus allowing for additional forms of mobilities beyond this official channel. In this section, I will further develop the portrait of Roraima as a deterritorialized zone by illustrating how localized practices also perform a specific role within the mobility regime.

First of all, although the mobility regime has indeed materialized the official channel of mobility as previously described, much of the omission of infrastructure constitutes the

alternatives channel of movement just as much as the infrastructure that has been installed. The border itself lacks any significant divisive infrastructure, with white markers that trace the territorial bound without actually impeding any traffic, as shown in Figure 16. Although the federal government does conduct monitoring of the border, the ecological nature of the border

Figure 16: Images of points along the Venezuela-Brazil border¹⁰²



¹⁰² “Fronteira Da Venezuela Com o Brasil Completa 30 Dias Fechada.” O Globo, March 22, 2019. <https://g1.globo.com/rr/roraima/noticia/2019/03/23/fronteira-da-venezuela-com-o-brasil-completa-30-dias-fechada.ghtml>.

Peduzzi, Pedro. “Brasil Já Reconheceu Mais De 11 Mil Refugiados Até 2018, Diz Conare.” Agência Brasil, July 25, 2019. <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/direitos-humanos/noticia/2019-07/brasil-ja-reconheceu-mais-de-11-mil-refugiados-ate-2018-diz-conare>.

makes this widely ineffective in policing unofficial crossings.¹⁰³ The border is widely devoid of waterways or major natural barriers and, as seen in Figure 17, the landscape surrounding the

Figure 17: Map of the vegetation along the Venezuela-Brazil border¹⁰⁴



Santa Elena de Uairén—Pacaraima crossing point primarily consists of savanna-like grasslands and scrub. In theory, the extensive demarcation of indigenous reservations along the border, as seen in Figure 18, should ensure more state control and monitoring of the region, as federal law requires the government to ensure that these lands are only occupied by indigenous peoples.¹⁰⁵ However, in practice, indigenous communities in these lands are often left to fend for themselves. For instance, in 2019 alone, there were 256 registered cases of invasions (often for

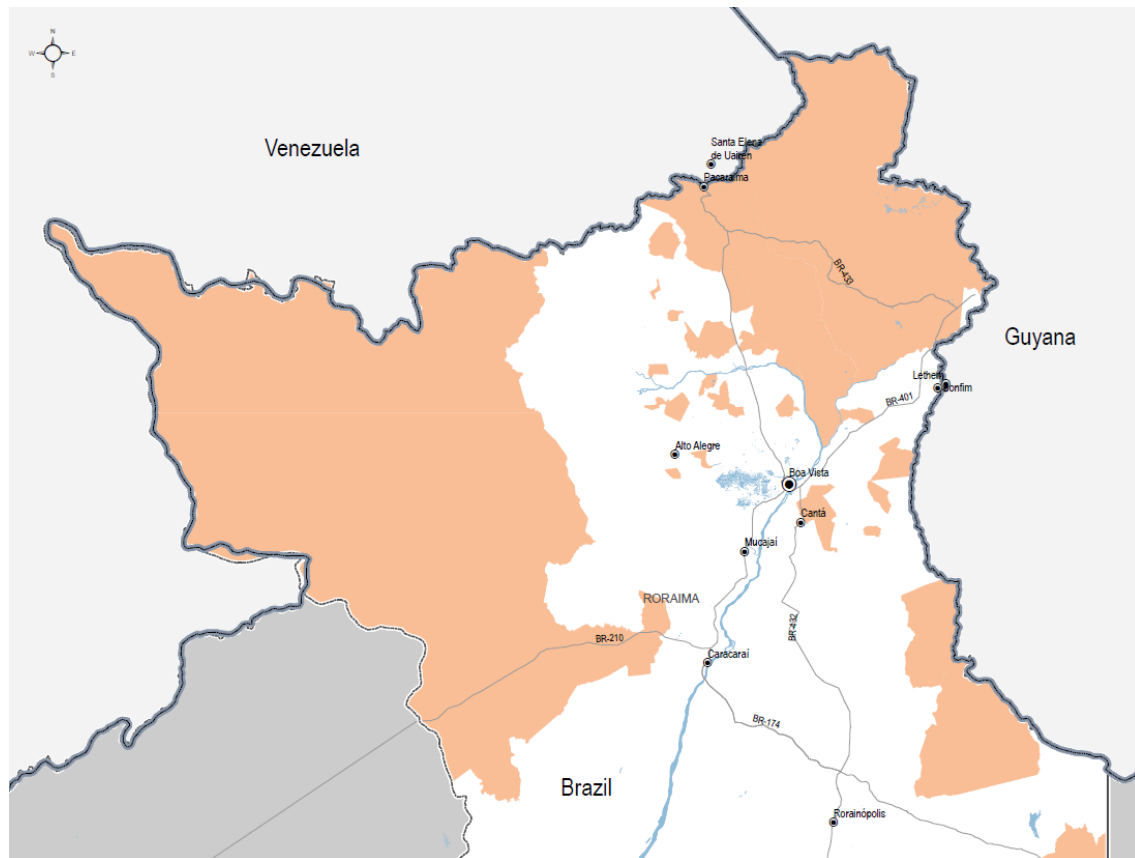
¹⁰³ Toledo, Marcelo, and Eduardo Knapp. “Invasão De Venezuelanos Fugindo De Crise No País Gera Caos Em Roraima.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, November 20, 2016. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2016/11/1833815-invasao-de-venezuelanos-fugindo-de-crise-no-pais-gera-caos-em-roraima.shtml>.

¹⁰⁴ Google Earth. Accessed April 8, 2021. <https://www.google.com/earth/>.

¹⁰⁵ “Por Que Demarcar?” FUNAI. Accessed April 8, 2021. <http://www.funai.gov.br/index.php/2014-02-07-13-25-20>.

land grabbing or exploration of natural resources) across 151 indigenous lands throughout the country.¹⁰⁶ As such, despite being difficult to track, testimonies from local residents indicate the

Figure 18: Map of demarcated indigenous territories in the state of Roraima¹⁰⁷



existence of at least seven points of clandestine crossings into Pacaraima that Venezuelans use to buy food and sell gasoline in Brazil. As a result of the growth of these alternative routes, motorcyclists are able to navigate through the brush-filled landscape in as fast as 15 minutes. In fact, to supplement this informal economy, indigenous communities located on or near the border have even begun charging migrants R\$20 to indicate the best routes to migrants hoping to

¹⁰⁶ Rangel, Lucia Helena, ed. Rep. *Violência Contra Os Povos Indígenas No Brasil*. Conselho Indigenista Missionário, September 2020. <https://cimi.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/relatorio-violencia-contra-os-povos-indigenas-brasil-2019-cimi.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ “Brazil - Roraima State: Indigenous Territories.” ReliefWeb, August 2018. <https://reliefweb.int/map/brazil/brazil-roraima-state-indigenous-territories-august-2018>.

embark on an unofficial crossing.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, even when crossing through the official channel in Pacaraima, migrants are sometimes able to pass through the city without registering with the Federal Police. The previously described infrastructure established by the government as a part of *Operação Acolhida* operates much more to route foot traffic to specific areas (such as the Triage Post) and does not necessarily act as a blockage to this traffic. As such, migrants who do not report to the Federal Police have been able to continue through the city towards Boa Vista, without ever being stopped by state agents.¹⁰⁹ In this sense, both the lacking state presence and ecological nature of the border region contribute to the relatively unrestrictive mobility regime.

In addition to expediting these relatively linear flows of migrants from Venezuela into Brazil's border cities, the mobility regime in Roraima has also grown to accommodate the non-linear back-and-forth motions that have been exacerbated with the growth of the crisis in Venezuela over the past several years. As previously described, prior to 2015, the border region was constituted by a consistent to-and-fro traffic of Brazilians and Venezuelans as they crossed the border to buy or sell products at more affordable or more lucrative rates in either country.¹¹⁰ The relatively stable and predictable nature of these flows thus established the rhythm at the border, which has since been disrupted due to the massive unidirectional influx of Venezuelan migrants. However, despite there being Venezuelans that choose to leave the country indefinitely, there are others that continue to move between Roraima and Venezuela in order to

¹⁰⁸ Toledo, Marcelo. "Venezuelanos Usam Rota Paralela Para Comprar Comida No Brasil." *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 1, 2017. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2017/01/1846140-rota-paralela-abre-brasil-a-venezuelanos.shtml>.

¹⁰⁹ Costa, Emily, and Inaê Brandão. "Rota Da Fome: o Caminho Dos Venezuelanos Que Enfrentam Perigo, Falta De Comida e De Água Para Chegar a Boa Vista." *G1*, March 2, 2018. <https://g1.globo.com/rr/roraima/noticia/rota-da-fome-o-caminho-dos-venezuelanos-que-enfrentam-perigo-falta-de-comida-e-de-agua-para-chegar-a-boa-vista.ghtml>.

¹¹⁰ Silva Barros, Pedro. "Roraima: Crescimento Sustentado Pelas Sanções Dos EUA à Venezuela." *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 14, 2021. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2021/01/roraima-crescimento-sustentado-pelas-sancoes-dos-eua-a-venezuela.shtml>.

buy products in Brazil that are unavailable in Venezuela.¹¹¹ In theory, the official channel of mobility accounts for these movements. Whereas the humanitarian visa allows migrants to come and go from the country, the legal system technically stipulates that asylum seekers inform officials when they return to Venezuela through an online portal. In practice, however, the lack of true barriers at the border makes it difficult to track these crossings or to enforce the informing process among asylum seekers. In fact, nearly all of the sources I reviewed that cited statistics for border crossings acknowledged that the figures were likely inaccurate due to the fact that the government is often unable to capture when migrants cross the border several times.¹¹² In fact, the border has come to present such permeability that it not only enables this back-and-forth motion in cases of economic need, but also social and familial desires. For example, at the end of 2018 and 2019, large numbers of Venezuelans returned home to spend the holidays with their families, after which they returned to Brazil in the beginning of 2019 and 2020.¹¹³ Therefore, despite the clearly designated channel of mobility, the interaction between the limited state presence, favorable ecological conditions, and specific motive forces has allowed for the continuation (and growth) of pre-crisis forms of mobility.

In fact, beyond these factors, there are local actors outside of the federally sanctioned response that have facilitated alternative modalities of movement through everyday, negotiated practices. Specifically, many of the indigenous communities that reside along the border throughout Roraima have come to operate as an informal structure supporting migrants along

¹¹¹ Toledo, Marcelo. “Venezuelanos Usam Rota Paralela Para Comprar Comida No Brasil.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 1, 2017. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2017/01/1846140-rota-paralela-abre-brasil-a-venezuelanos.shtml>.

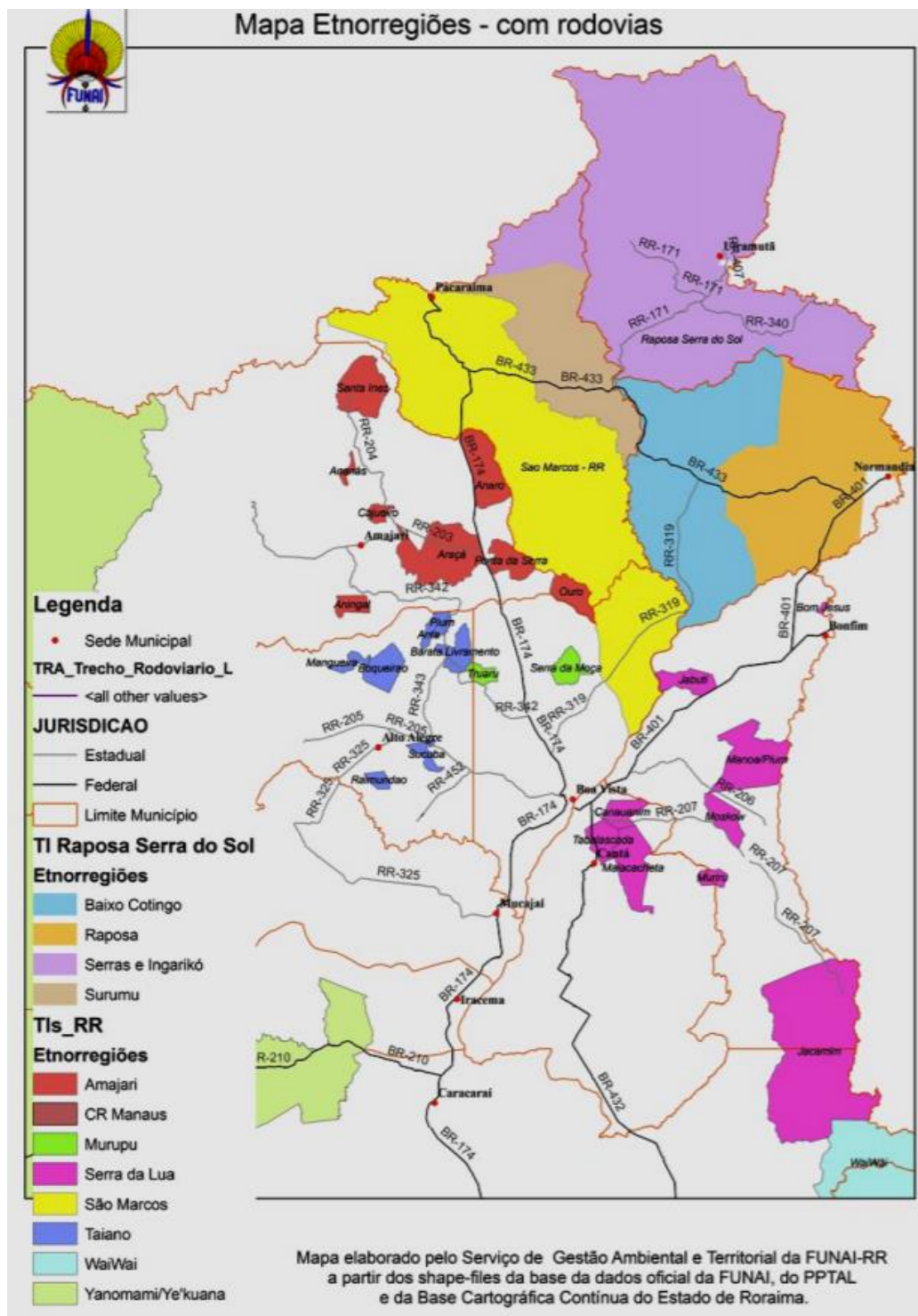
¹¹² Costa, Emily, and Inaê Brandão. “Rota Da Fome: o Caminho Dos Venezuelanos Que Enfrentam Perigo, Falta De Comida e De Água Para Chegar a Boa Vista.” *G1*, March 2, 2018. <https://g1.globo.com/rr/roraima/noticia/rota-da-fome-o-caminho-dos-venezuelanos-que-enfrentam-perigo-falta-de-comida-e-de-agua-para-chegar-a-boa-vista.ghtml>.

¹¹³ Maisonnave, Fabiano, and Avenir Prado. “Interiorização De Venezuelanos Terá 'Hub' Em Campinas.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 14, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/01/interiorizacao-de-venezuelanos-tera-hub-em-campinas.shtml>.

their journey. In addition to the aforementioned practice within indigenous communities of charging migrants to navigate them through unofficial crossing points, many of the residents of the provide sustenance to migrants along their journey or, in some cases, house them.

Considering several different indigenous communities line the BR-174, as seen in Figure 19,

Figure 19: Map of indigenous ethno-regions throughout the state of Roraima¹¹⁴



¹¹⁴ Oliveira Bortolon, Dielci Maria. “Terra Indígena Araçá/Roraima: Continuidades e Transformações Envolvendo Coletividades Macuxi,” 2014.
<https://www.univates.br/bdu/bitstream/10737/722/1/2014DielciMariaOliveiraBortolon.pdf>.

Figure 20: Map of the São Marcos and Raposa Serra do Sol indigenous lands¹¹⁵



migrants often turn to them in desperation along the long journey to Boa Vista.¹¹⁶ Specifically, in the São Marcos indigenous land (among others) shown in Figure 20, migrants make informal agreements with the indigenous communities, offering to help with work on the land or other activities in exchange for a place to stay.¹¹⁷ In this sense, these communities not only are acting to create their own channels of mobility, they are nourishing this mobility by offering alternative forms of social support outside of the government-run shelters in Pacaraima and Boa Vista.

¹¹⁵ Bilenky, Thais. “Índios Em Roraima Criam Gado Em Fazendas ‘Herdadas’ De Ruralistas.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 30, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/01/1954274-indios-em-roraima-criam-gado-em-fazendas-herdadas-de-ruralistas.shtml>.

¹¹⁶ Costa, Emily, and Inaê Brandão. “Rota Da Fome: o Caminho Dos Venezuelanos Que Enfrentam Perigo, Falta De Comida e De Água Para Chegar a Boa Vista.” *G1*, March 2, 2018. <https://g1.globo.com/rr/roraima/noticia/rota-da-fome-o-caminho-dos-venezuelanos-que-enfrentam-perigo-falta-de-comida-e-de-agua-para-chegar-a-boa-vista.ghtml>.

¹¹⁷ Fellet, João. “Hostilizados Nas Cidades, Venezuelanos Buscam Abrigo Em Aldeias Indígenas De Roraima.” *BBC News Brasil*, September 2, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-45325672>.

Additionally, the indigenous communities that span the border have come to represent one of the most salient forms of mobility that circumvents the western state. Specifically, in 2019, following incidents at the border that I will describe in the next chapter, nearly 1,000 members of the Pemón community on the Venezuelan side of the border crossed into Pacaraima. However, rather than seeking shelter and service in the *Operação Acolhida* regime, they found refuge with their relatives residing in villages near the border. Many of them were able to easily integrate, given shared language and culture, and ended up staying indefinitely in the São Marcos indigenous land, across the villages of Bananal, Sorocaima, Sakaomota and Tarauparu. Markedly, this case study demonstrates how “shows that national borders, especially in the Northern Region, are often referred to by indigenous peoples as empty spaces or “green borders” – these are, in fact, spaces inhabited by indigenous populations.”¹¹⁸

Nonetheless, I want to begin to introduce an idea here, which I will continue to elaborate in the next section, about the implications of expanded mobility. As noted by the new mobilities scholars, mobility does not ubiquitously entail a liberating experience for all those involved. Although some members of certain indigenous communities have disposed themselves to supporting both indigenous and non-indigenous migrants, this increased traffic has generated negative impacts on some of these populations. Some members of indigenous communities on the Brazilian side of the border have reported frustration concerning the migrants’ impact on public services, fear that the migrants will introduce infectious diseases in the communities, and concerns that the migrants will never leave the settlements.¹¹⁹ In fact, indigenous communities in São Marcos have reported daily recurring instances of Venezuelans invading their lands to cut

¹¹⁸ Moreira, Elaine, and Marcelo Torelly. Rep. *Durable Solutions for Indigenous Migrants and Refugees in the Context of the Venezuelan Flow in Brazil*. Brasília: International Organization for Migration, 2020.

¹¹⁹ Fellet, João. “Hostilizados Nas Cidades, Venezuelanos Buscam Abrigo Em Aldeias Indígenas De Roraima.” BBC News Brasil, September 2, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-45325672>.

down wood in the forest and use the rivers and natural springs, which has polluted the environment and the water sources.¹²⁰ Additionally, due to the expansion of traffic along clandestine trails along the border, organized crime has begun to expand in the region. Many local indigenous residents have expressed concerns with the growth in this traffic, especially as it has led to increased theft within their communities. Such frustration with Venezuelan mobility among indigenous communities near the border even led to a protest along the BR-174 for greater control of the border.¹²¹ Therefore, this not only serves as a critical reminder of the diverse and varied perspectives, practices, and impacts of mobility among indigenous communities, but it also sets the stage for a discussion of why mobility, though a critical resource, cannot be romanticized.

¹²⁰ “Líder Indígena Denuncia Invasão e Depredação De Nascente.” *Folha de Boa Vista*, September 24, 2019. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/CIDADES/Capital/Lider-indigena-denuncia-invasao-e-depredacao-de-nascente-/57707>.

¹²¹ Fellet, João. “Hostilizados Nas Cidades, Venezuelanos Buscam Abrigo Em Aldeias Indígenas De Roraima.” *BBC News Brasil*, September 2, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-45325672>.

Chapter IV: Reterritorialization as a localized and discursive practice

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which regional and local agents have worked to demarcate and restrict access to the national territory in response to the influx of migrants and the facilitation of this influx by other agents within the mobility regime. To do so, I will focus on the frictions that have been produced in the migratory process for Venezuelans as well as the embodied reality of this experience. Firstly, I will illustrate the ways in which different forms of mobility have been treated differently in distinct moments over the past several years by focusing on questions related to indigenous migration. In addition to being treated as threatening in the early moments of the crisis, the militarization of the federal humanitarian response has produced a differentially embodied experience of mobility for these individuals. Secondly, I will analyze the ways in which the border itself has been used by both the Venezuelan and Brazilian state to demonize various forms of mobility traversing the region for largely performative and discursive political purposes. Finally, this will set the stage for the last section, in which I expand on the ways in which local residents of Roraima have felt empowered to take the process of reterritorialization into their own hands. By analyzing a series of xenophobic protests and attacks on Venezuelans, I will illustrate the way in which power is constantly exercised and negotiated from a multiple of different localized points in mobility regimes. All in all, these examples will serve to further highlight the ways in which this reterritorialization is inextricably linked to the previously described process of deterritorialization in a dialectical relationship.

Continuations of colonial challenges to indigenous mobility and occupation

Markedly, the mobility regime has, in different moments, treated specific forms of mobility as threatening, especially in the initial stages of the exacerbation of the crisis. As Venezuelan terrestrial migration began increasing in 2015, the Federal Police immediately reacted by deporting those Venezuelans who had entered on a tourist visa and were engaging in remunerated activities, who had an expired tourist visa, or who were undocumented altogether.¹²² Whereas only 54 Venezuelans were deported in 2015, the number grew to 445 in the following year.¹²³ However, it is critical to note that these deportations were disproportionately aimed at indigenous migrants, primarily from the Warao community, who were fleeing from the economic and political crisis in the country in addition to a drought that inhibited their community from surviving on agricultural production alone.¹²⁴ Of the nearly 500 individuals deported from 2015 to 2016, 223 were members of indigenous communities.¹²⁵ The influx of these individuals was highly visible in Boa Vista, where they sold traditional artisanal products or begged for money in the street. The municipal government, however, claimed that the deportations aimed to remove Venezuelans from the “subhuman” conditions in which they were living and to “guarantee that their rights were preserved.”¹²⁶ Such a claim proves to be

¹²² Júnior, Amílcar. “Índias Venezuelanas Deixaram Maridos Para Trás e Vieram Em Busca De Comida.” *Folha de Boa Vista*, September 29, 2016. <https://www.folhabv.com.br/noticia/CIDADES/Capital/Indias-venezuelanas-deixaram-maridos-para-tras-e-vieram-em-busca-de-comida-/20651>.

¹²³ Toledo, Marcelo. “Deportações De Venezuelanos Na Fronteira Com Roraima Crescem 824%.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, November 23, 2016. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2016/11/1834629-deportacoes-de-venezuelanos-na-fronteira-com-roraima-crescem-824.shtml>

¹²⁴ Correia, Luan Guilherme. “PF Já Deportou 253 Estrangeiros Que Estavam Ilegais Em Roraima.” *Folha de Boa Vista*, April 15, 2016. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/CIDADES/Capital/PF-ja-deportou-253-estrangeiros-que-estavam-ilegais-em-Roraima/15569>.

¹²⁵ Júnior, Amílcar. “Mais Índias Venezuelanas Chegam Para Pedir Esmola Nos Semáforos.” *Folha de Boa Vista*, November 19, 2016. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/CIDADES/Capital/Mais-indias-venezuelanas-chegam-para-pedir-esmola-nos-semaforos-/22490>.

¹²⁶ Correia, Luan Guilherme. “PF Já Deportou 253 Estrangeiros Que Estavam Ilegais Em Roraima.” *Folha de Boa Vista*, April 15, 2016. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/CIDADES/Capital/PF-ja-deportou-253-estrangeiros-que-estavam-ilegais-em-Roraima/15569>.

incongruent with the reality these migrants face in Venezuela, as many reporting returning after being deported because of a lack of food where they live.¹²⁷ Indeed, when contextualizing this within the broader history of the border described in Chapter II, these deportations illustrate two key insights about historical forms of mobility. Firstly, they can be seen as a continuation not only of the longstanding vision of Venezuela as a geopolitical threat to Brazil's sovereignty, which has historically provoked processes of reterritorialization and increased state presence in the border region. Secondly, the stigmatization specifically of indigenous mobility represents an extension of colonial forms of violence that have invalidated indigenous occupation of land and, more specifically, limited the mobility of a traditionally nomadic tribe such as the Warao.

Nonetheless, as I will continue to illustrate throughout this chapter, the Brazilian mobility regime is composed of a heterogeneous body of actors that deploy a variety of often contradictory strategies that produce this crisscrossing of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. By the end of 2016, the federal response to the influx began to show signs of a shift towards the more humanitarian response for which it has gained international praise. In December of that year, the Federal Police announced plans to deport a group of 450 Venezuelans that they had detained living without appropriate documentation in Boa Vista, the majority of whom were Warao.¹²⁸ However, the Public Defender of the Union submitted an injunction request against the action, which was granted by the Federal Court.¹²⁹ In her judgment, the circuit judge presiding over the decision cited Article N. 5 in the Federal Constitution, which dictates the equal treatment of

¹²⁷ Júnior, Amílcar. "Índias Venezuelanas Deixaram Maridos Para Trás e Vieram Em Busca De Comida." *Folha de Boa Vista*, September 29, 2016. <https://www.folhabv.com.br/noticia/CIDADES/Capital/Indias-venezuelanas-deixaram-maridos-para-tras-e-vieram-em-busca-de-comida-/20651>.

¹²⁸ Alvim, Mariana. "A Cronologia Da Crise Migratória Em Pacaraima, Na Fronteira Entre Brasil e Venezuela." *BBC News Brasil*, August 20, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-45242682>.

¹²⁹ Ruseishvili, Svetlana, et al. "Construção social do estado de emergência e governança das migrações. O decreto estadual N 24.469-E como divisor de águas." Essay. In *Migrações Venezuelanas*, 57-67. Nepo/Unicamp, 2018. brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migracoes_venezuelanas.pdf.

Brazilians and foreign residents in Brazil. Subsequently, the federal and municipal governments began transitioning towards measures to accommodate these flows of Venezuelans, as previously described. This clash between the Federal Police and the judiciary demonstrates the ways in which mobility regimes do not function as a coherent and singular source of power. Even within an entity that is often considered in functionalist terms such as the federal government, the visible and embodied outcomes of federal actions cannot be seen as a linear union of independent elements.

Although this action recognizes the need to make mobility a more widely accessible resource, the indigenous migrant experience following this action illustrates the ways in which mobility cannot be treated as an indiscriminate form of liberation. Despite the purported transition to a humanitarian response in 2018, the federal response committee allocated its aid budget entirely to the Ministry of Defense, thus putting the armed forces at the helm of the administration of this aid. The involvement of the armed forces has been criticized as being incongruent with the principle of humanitarianism, especially as it relates to indigenous migrants. For instance, the sale of artisanal products, such as hammocks and baskets made from buriti fiber, represents one of the key sources of income and economic sustenance for Warao migrants in Brazil. However, when these individuals pass through the army's control post at the border, the fiber or these items are often confiscated in excess of the legally permitted amount (considered contraband). As a result, Warao migrants have had to adjust their practices and even their routes of movement. One alternative that many have turned to is begging for money in the street, yet this also exposes them to the increased police presence in the border cities.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Maisonnave, Fabiano. "Índios Venezuelanos Relatam Confisco De Artesanato No Brasil." Folha de S.Paulo, June 6, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/06/indios-venezuelanos-relatam-confisco-de-artesanato-no-brasil.shtml>.

Although deportation is no longer in the legal arsenal of tools to control Venezuelan occupation of space in the borderland, the police has been used to displace migrants from public spaces, such as when Vice President Hamilton Mourão visited Boa Vista and Pacaraima in 2020.¹³¹ Additionally, the disruption of Warao artisanal commerce creates friction in the back-and-forth rhythm of the nomadic community. For Warao migrants living in Roraima (or even in the neighboring state of Pará), it is common to vacillate between their home communities and their residence in Brazil in order to exchange clothes, food, and medicines from Brazil for crafts made by their family in Venezuela.¹³² Nonetheless, the seizure of fiber and artisanal products at the border does not necessarily preclude Warao people from continuing the activity in Brazil, as they can find other materials (such as nylon)¹³³ and organizations such as UNHCR provide them with raw material¹³⁴. However, Warao people have affirmed that these materials are of lower quality, as it is imported from the state of Maranhão because the buriti tree is protected in Roraima.¹³⁵

Similarly, the military administration of the shelters, especially the indigenous shelters of Pintolândia (Boa Vista) and Janokoida (Pacaraima), has further contributed to this dissonance between the ways in which mobility is represented within the regional and international community and the ways in which it is experienced at the individual level by indigenous migrants. Reports have indicated that military personnel at these shelters often disregard the needs of their residents or create a hostile environment. In a visit to the shelters in 2018, the

¹³¹ “Imigrantes Venezuelanos Somem Das Ruas.” Folha de Boa Vista, February 13, 2020.

<https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/CIDADES/Capital/Imigrantes-venezuelanos-somem-das-ruas-/62674>.

¹³² Maisonnave, Fabiano. “Índios Venezuelanos Relatam Confisco De Artesanato No Brasil.” Folha de S.Paulo, June 6, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/06/indios-venezuelanos-relatam-confisco-de-artesanato-no-brasil.shtml>.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Maisonnave, Fabiano, and Avenier Prado. “Índios Venezuelanos Em Boa Vista Sofrem Com Superlotação e Crack.” Folha de S.Paulo, January 14, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/01/indios-venezuelanos-em-boa-vista-sofrem-com-superlotacao-e-crack.shtml>.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) found evidence that the military members leading the shelters ignored requests to coordinate services with caciques (indigenous community leaders) and that they used offensive verbiage while talking about the indigenous residents, referring to them as *gafanhotos* (locusts) and claiming that they are not interested in helping themselves in the long term. Looking at indigenous artisanal production and their experiences in the federal shelters underscores that mobility is more than just a linear path from origin to destination, but rather a series of conditions and practices that enable, channel, and block this path. As such, changes in traffic along these paths cannot be evaluated without a broader understanding of these practices. In other words, although the deportation of indigenous Venezuelan migrants clearly perpetuated colonial forms of violence against these communities, the subsequent processes of deterritorialization cannot be romanticized as a disembodied experience.

The border as a geopolitical tool

In this section, I will highlight the ways in which the Venezuela-Brazil border has been employed in reterritorialization efforts in different moments for a variety of geopolitical motives. Specifically, I will explore the 2018 attempt to close the Brazilian side of the border by the state of Roraima because of the massive influx of migrants and the 2019 closure of the Venezuelan side of the border in response to attempts to deliver humanitarian aid to the country. Firstly, calling attention to these two instances helps to underscore that, even amidst the lack of infrastructure and state presence along the border, it has not achieved a fully deterritorialized status. In fact, by emphasizing the practical difficulty in truly barring movement across the border from either side, I will reinforce the ways in which mobility is not only an embodied and

practiced experience as previously described, but also a discursively constructed representation. Indeed, the attempts to seal the borders will set the stage for these representations to take an embodied form, as I will describe in the following section.

The state of Roraima vying for control of the border

Despite the generally humanitarian approach adopted by the federal government and third sector, the influx of migrants has come to be associated in the local Brazilian imaginary with the structural issues facing the state of Roraima. The local hegemonic narrative sustains that Venezuelan migrants are responsible for “the increase in violence rates in the state, unemployment among Brazilians, a ‘healthcare chaos, and for turning Boa Vista, supposedly ‘one of the best cities to live’ into an unsafe place to live.”¹³⁶ Local news outlets, in particular, produce and reinforce these conceptions of the transformation of the border region. One article, titled “Pacaraima ‘turned into’ Santa Elena, merchants say”, explains how the local shopkeepers and vendors that chose to open businesses in Pacaraima due to the calm nature of the city are now having to face conditions akin to those across the border. The author describes how Venezuelan migrants engage in predatory competitive behaviors, such as selling the same products or items as Brazilian merchants in front of their shops at half the price, suggesting that they have led to the closure of local businesses. She then quotes a series of merchants, who complain of the lack of border control, the lack of street cleaning, the violence, and the number of homeless people, all of which they link to the influx of migrants. One individual quoted in the

¹³⁶ G. da Silva Sarmiento, Gilmar, and F. dos Santos Rodrigues. “Entre a acolhida e o rechaço: breves notas sobre a violência e os paradoxos da migração venezuelana para o Brasil.” Essay. In *Migrações Venezuelanas*, 242-249. Nepo/Unicamp, 2018. Brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf.

article claimed that “immigration came to destroy the state.”¹³⁷ Even national news outlets fomented such narratives. One article from the *Folha de São Paulo*, titled “Invasion of Venezuelans fleeing from crisis in the country causes chaos in Roraima”, draws similar links between the influx of migrants and issues such as increasing strain on hospitals, higher levels of violence, malaria outbreaks, and prostitution. In addition to this, the author explains how high traffic areas in Boa Vista, such as the bus station, now reek of “urine and smeared feces,” and how “the city is experiencing a scene from a post-war film, with a lot of trash piled up in the streets, disheveled traffic in the commercial center, and Venezuelans arriving in every moment.” Perhaps most emblematic of the hegemonic discourse, the article quotes the mayor of Pacaraima, Juliano Torquato, who explains that “an effort is needed to keep them in Venezuela in some way. Pacaraima will need to be rebuilt, from how chaotic it is.”¹³⁸

Although the process of accommodating such an influx undoubtedly has presented challenges to the region, local authorities and new sources tended to overlook the true roots of the issues being faced and to erroneously portray the role of Venezuelan migration. For instance, despite sensationalist reports that the migration would bring about a collapse of the local health system, federal data from 2013 indicates that the system was already in precarious conditions, having been identified as the third worst in the country in terms of capacity per habitant.¹³⁹ Similarly, the lack of stable industries and high percentage of the population depending on the public sector for employment in the region puts claims of Venezuelans creating an employment

¹³⁷ Gomes, Ana Gabriela. “Pacaraima ‘virou’ Santa Elena, dizem comerciantes.” *Folha de Boa Vista*, August 1, 2018. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/Pacaraima--virou--Santa-Elena--dizem-comerciantes/42491>.

¹³⁸ Toledo, Marcelo, and Eduardo Knapp. “Invasão De Venezuelanos Fugindo De Crise No País Gera Caos Em Roraima.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, November 20, 2016. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2016/11/1833815-invasao-de-venezuelanos-fugindo-de-crise-no-pais-gera-caos-em-roraima.shtml>.

¹³⁹ De Almeida Costa Barreto, Tarcia Millene, et al. “Os impactos nos serviços de saúde decorrentes da migração venezuelana em Roraima: ensaio reflexivo.” Essay. In *Migrações Venezuelanas*, 369-373. Nepo/Unicamp, 2018. Brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf.

crisis into question.¹⁴⁰ In a more general sense, the previously described haphazard process of municipal emancipation can also partially account for these problems attributed to Venezuelan migrants, as Roraima has struggled economically from a lack of industry, socially from weak public infrastructure, and politically from isolation from the federal government for several decades now due to the lack of planning and resources committed to this emancipation process. This is not to downplay or negate the true hardships being faced by residents of Boa Vista or Pacaraima, as they indeed have had to contend with such issues as outbreaks of infectious diseases and a limited government funding.¹⁴¹ Rather, my aim is to underscore how this spatial imaginary of Roraima is constructed in such a way to hide the structural conditions that have produced the current situation. In other words, I want to highlight that, although issues such as unemployment may now be more salient because of the influx of migrants, they are indeed structural and historical issues that did not simply emerge because of this influx.

In response to the construction of this spatial imaginary of Roraima as a previously harmonious zone now ravaged by Venezuelan migration, the state government responded with an attempt to bar this influx and restore a clear delineation between Brazilian and Venezuelan territories. In April of 2018, Suely Campos, the then governor of the state of Roraima, submitted a request to the Federal Supreme Court for the “temporary closing of the Brazil-Venezuela border in order to prevent the disorderly immigration flux from producing more devastating effects for Brazilians.”¹⁴² In an open letter that she wrote following the request, she explains that these effects include outbreaks of epidemics and an increase in the influx of drugs, guns, and

¹⁴⁰ Campos Mello, Patrícia, and Avener Prado. “Venezuelanos Sobrecarregam Serviços Públicos Em RR, Que Vive Crise Fiscal.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, August 29, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/venezuelanos-sobrecarregam-servicos-publicos-em-rr-que-vive-crise-fiscal.shtml>.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Campos Mello, Patrícia, and Sylvia Colombo. “Fechar a Fronteira Com a Venezuela é Incogitável, Diz Temer.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, April 18, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/04/fechar-a-fronteira-com-a-venezuela-e-incogitavel-diz-temer.shtml>.

criminals. Furthermore, she criticized the response of the federal government, which she described as an omission, considering the lack of infrastructure and security at the border. In her words, “we request the temporary restriction of or limit to the entrance of new migrants until the Union assumes its constitutional duty of promoting measures in the area of security control, health, and sanitary surveillance.”¹⁴³ Ironically, the request came shortly after the federal government’s rollout of *Operação Acolhida*, which aims to address all of these concerns. In fact, almost immediately following the announcement of the request, the president at the time, Michel Temer, released a statement affirming that closing the border would be “unimaginable.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, while awaiting an official response from the federal justice system (and likely recognizing the legal improbability and practical difficulty of closing the border), Campos issued a decree in August that, among other measures, required Venezuelan migrants to present a valid passport to use the healthcare or education system, once again citing the supposed omission of the federal government. In effect, this almost entirely excluded migrants from these services, considering the majority of them cross the border without passports. In justifying the decree, Campos affirmed that the Venezuelan exodus has impacted the health, education, and security systems in Roraima and asserted that they can no longer “allow a Venezuelan to be serviced to the detriment of a Brazilian.”¹⁴⁵ In this sense, Campos’ response transformed from an attempt to directly hinder movement to attacking mobility by making social reproduction unsustainable.

¹⁴³ Campos, Suely. “Suely Campos: De Roraima Para Brasília.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, May 6, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opinioao/2018/05/suely-campos-de-roraima-para-brasilia.shtml>.

¹⁴⁴ Campos Mello, Patrícia, and Sylvia Colombo. “Fechar a Fronteira Com a Venezuela é Incogitável, Diz Temer.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, April 18, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/04/fechar-a-fronteira-com-a-venezuela-e-incogitavel-diz-temer.shtml>.

¹⁴⁵ Toledo, Marcelo. “RR obrigará venezuelanos a mostrar passaporte para ter atendimento médico.” *Folha de S. Paulo*, August 1, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/rr-obrigara-venezuelanos-a-mostrar-passaporte-para-ter-atendimento-medico.shtml>.

Campos' actions then set off a series of legal actions, ultimately demanding a decision about whether to restrict Venezuelan access to Brazil. Following her issuance of the decree, the Federal Public Ministry and the Public Defender's Office of the Union emitted requests that the decree be suspended. In response, judge Helder Girão Barreto, from the 1st Federal Circuit Court of the state, issued a decision, temporarily prohibiting Venezuelans from entering the country, until they could reach a "numeric balance" with the interiorization program.¹⁴⁶ In reality, though, the border was only closed for approximately 15 hours, as the federal appellate judge Kassio Nunes Marques suspended Barreto's injunction, following a request from the Union. Marques argued that such an action would violate international obligations that the country has agreed to regarding migration. In the same week, the Federal Supreme Court also responded to Campos' request for the temporary closure of the border. The justice Rosa Weber denied the request, affirming not only that the action would conflict with several treaties signed by Brazil regarding migration, but also that such measures could deprive individuals of the possibility of requesting refuge in the country.¹⁴⁷ Thus, both of these decisions—from Weber and Marques—reopened the border, setting legal precedent limiting the future possibility for reterritorialization efforts. However, despite the clarity and consistency in this messaging, tracing this legal back-and-forth across different branches and levels of government underscores the difficulty in cementing either mobility or immobility. In fact, although the reigning decision was in favor of mobility, later in this chapter I will illustrate how these discourses in favor of immobility trickled down to the local population, reinitiating this decision to reinstate the border.

¹⁴⁶ "Juiz veta entrada de venezuelanos na fronteira com o Brasil em Roraima." *Folha de S. Paulo*, August 6, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/juiz-veta-entrada-de-venezuelanos-na-fronteira-com-o-brasil-em-roraima.shtml>.

¹⁴⁷ Toledo, Marcelo. "Após 15 Horas Fechada, Fronteira Com a Venezuela é Reaberta Em Roraima." *Folha de S. Paulo*, August 7, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/apos-15-horas-fechada-fronteira-com-a-venezuela-e-reaberta-em-roraima.shtml>.

Venezuela's closure of the border as an assertion of sovereignty

Of course, the Venezuela-Brazil border is constituted by bidirectional movement, despite the uneven nature of these flows in recent years. Movements from Brazil to Venezuela that have expanded or changed due to the exacerbation of the crisis have set the ground for a process of discursive reterritorialization from the Venezuelan side of the border as well. Specifically, in February of 2019, the government of Brazil announced its plans to facilitate the transport of humanitarian aid into Venezuela per the request of self-declared interim president Juan Guaidó. Guaidó mobilized a wide contingent of Venezuelans both in Brazil and in Venezuela to organize a series of trucks loaded with medicine and food to traverse through Boa Vista and Pacaraima into Santa Elena de Uairén.¹⁴⁸ Markedly, as previously described, the flow of medicines and food items into Venezuela has become commonplace over the past several years, thus becoming a sort of rhythmic norm. In this sense, the envoy in and of itself is not particularly notable in terms of mobility; rather, it is once again the discursive representations of this movement that produce a clash of reterritorial and deterritorial practices. The envoy was part of a broader geopolitical strategy launched by a global coalition including the United States to infiltrate the country with aid from Colombia, Brazil, and an undisclosed island in the Caribbean. This coalition consisted of several countries that recognize Guaidó as the legitimate president of Venezuela and sustain that Maduro is a fraudulent dictator exacerbating the current crisis.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, in addition to representing an affirmation of the crisis that Maduro denies, the envoy comes to represent an expression of power—the ability of the opposition countries to penetrate Venezuela.

¹⁴⁸ “Brasil Facilitará El Envío De Ayuda Humanitaria a Su Frontera Con Venezuela.” BBC News Mundo, February 20, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47304336>.

¹⁴⁹ Ramirez, Maria. “Indigenous Pemon on Venezuela's Border with Brazil Vow to Let Aid In.” Reuters, February 9, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-aid-indigenous/indigenous-pemon-on-venezuelas-border-with-brazil-vow-to-let-aid-in-idUSKCN1PY0MO>.

Naturally, considering the opposition's exercise of power was built on the penetrable nature of the border, Maduro's denial of this power and reassertion of his own sovereignty sought to reinforce the impermeability of the border. As the envoy of aid was scheduled for the 23rd of February, Maduro ordered the closing of the border on the 21st.¹⁵⁰ Consequently, he sent at least five tanks and several trucks to the border to block the aid.¹⁵¹ The move provoked a protest among residents in Santa Elena de Uairén, especially those from the Pemón indigenous community, who inhabit the Gran Sabana region of the state of Bolívar and who have had a long history of conflict with Venezuelan security and military forces. When the military forces blocked off the Troncal 10, a violent confrontation took place between the two groups, leaving one Pemon individual dead and several injured. Notably, precisely because of the lack of medical supplies in the hospital on the Venezuelan side of the border, six of the injured members of the community were transferred to Boa Vista for treatment.¹⁵²

Nonetheless, the porous nature of the border and the difficulty in blocking flows made these efforts to stop the envoy relatively futile, as much of the aid was inevitably transferred to the Venezuelan side of the border.¹⁵³ In addition, beyond the envoy itself, migrants were also able to continue to smuggle food and products back into Venezuela or flee the country despite the closure of the official entry by using the previously described clandestine trails through

¹⁵⁰ Carvalho, Daniel. "Governador De Roraima Diz Que Fronteira Com Venezuela Já Está Fechada." Folha de S.Paulo, February 21, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/02/governador-de-roraima-diz-que-fronteira-com-venezuela-ja-esta-fechada.shtml>.

¹⁵¹ "Tanques chegam a Santa Elena e Maduro fecha a fronteira." Folha de Boa Vista, February 22, 2019. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/POLITICA/Roraima/Tanques-chegam-a-Santa-Elena-e-Maduro-fecha-a-fronteira/50238>.

¹⁵² "Militares Reprimieron Protesta En Santa Elena De Uairén Que Exigía Reapertura De La Frontera." El Universal, February 22, 2019. <https://www.eluniversal.com/politica/33854/militares-reprimen-protesta-en-limite-con-brasil#:~:text=La%20protesta%20se%20da%20horas,mayor%C3%ADa%20por%20disparos%20de%20armas>.

¹⁵³ Sahhar, Georgette. "Primer Cargamento De Ayuda Humanitaria Entró Por La Frontera Con Brasil." El Universal, February 23, 2019. <https://www.eluniversal.com/politica/33908/guaido-anuncio-que-ya-entro-el-primer-cargamento-de-ayuda-humanitaria-a-venezuela-por-frontera-con>.

indigenous territories. However, due to the increased military presence at the border, many of these migrants had to bribe members of the Venezuelan National Guard in order to access these trails; if they did not have the money to pay the steep fines, they had to seek out even longer trails to cross for free.¹⁵⁴ The Pemón people specifically were able to cross into the villages of other indigenous communities which with they share cultural ties to seek refuge, as described in Chapter III. Such practices underscore the disparity between Maduro's discursive assertion of sovereignty through the border closure and the localized reality of border making.

Maduro's closure of the border called attention to the ways in which the two regions are dependent on mutual forms of exchange. Most saliently, the package of humanitarian aid served as a reminder of Venezuela's reliance on necessities, such as food items and medicines, from Brazil. At the same time, however, the closure also highlighted Venezuela's control over Roraima's energy supply. As previously mentioned, Roraima is the only state in Brazil not connected to the national electrical system and thus receives the majority of its electricity supply from Venezuela (130 megawatts of its 200-megawatt total consumption). Following the closure of the border, the current governor of the state of Roraima, Antonio Denarium, expressed concerns about the potential cutting of energy from Venezuela if tensions continued to increase, which would drive the state to have to ration energy stores.¹⁵⁵ In fact, one of the first meetings held between authorities from Brazil and Venezuela concerning the border closure was specifically focused on how to negotiate the reopening because of the importance of the economic exchange between the two regions, namely the aforementioned products and

¹⁵⁴ Boadle, Anthony. "Venezuela Reopens Border Where Migrants Used Trails to Reach Brazil." Reuters, May 10, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-brazil-border/venezuela-reopens-border-where-migrants-used-trails-to-reach-brazil-idUSKCN1SG1ZK>.

¹⁵⁵ Carvalho, Daniel. "Governador De Roraima Diz Que Fronteira Com Venezuela Já Está Fechada." Folha de S.Paulo, February 21, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/02/governador-de-roraima-diz-que-fronteira-com-venezuela-ja-esta-fechada.shtml>.

electricity.¹⁵⁶ Consequently, Maduro reopened the border in May of 2019, roughly three months after its initial closure.¹⁵⁷ It may seem ironic that the same form of mobility (commercial exchange) that provoked the closing of the border served as justification for its reopening. Such a paradox exemplifies the dialectic between reterritorialization and deterritorialization.

Moreover, the politicization of this humanitarian aid speaks to the broader geopolitical project that has influenced the response of the Brazilian state to the influx of Venezuelan migrants. Just as the envoy represented an attack on Maduro's sovereignty over Venezuela, the movement of people across the border has similarly come to play part of Brazil's ideological rejection of the Bolivarian government. Although the humanitarian response of the Brazilian government to the arrival of such large numbers of Venezuelans may seem incongruent with Bolsonaro's nationalistic rhetoric, the geopolitics of the region can at least partially resolve this oxymoron. As one UNHCR employee at the border explained that, because the current Brazilian government is critical of the Venezuelan government, it "feels the obligation to shelter those who have suffered as a result of that regime."¹⁵⁸ Providing migrants with humanitarian conditions and protections in Brazil thus helps to create a portrait of a sympathetic and flourishing right-wing country in the face of the inhumane and authoritarian failure of a left-wing country. Perhaps most emblematic of this discourse, at the beginning of 2019, Bolsonaro pulled Brazil out of the Global Compact for Migration. However, his Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Ernesto Araújo, announced that "in the case of Venezuelans that are fleeing from the Maduro regime, we will

¹⁵⁶ "Reabertura Da Fronteira é Discutida Em Encontro." Folha de Boa Vista, March 4, 2019. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/POLITICA/Roraima/Reabertura-da-fronteira-e-discutida-em-encontro/50657>.

¹⁵⁷ "Venezuela Reabre Fronteira Com Brasil e Aruba, Diz Ministro." Folha de Boa Vista, May 10, 2019. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/POLITICA/Brasil/Venezuela-reabre-fronteira-com-Brasil-e-Aruba--diz-ministro/53169>.

¹⁵⁸ *Fuga Para a Liberdade: a Saga Dos Venezuelanos No Brasil*. YouTube. VEJA, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMBUtl09gKA&t=325s>.

continue to shelter them.”¹⁵⁹ Indeed, despite refusing to commit to global cooperation on migratory issues, Bolsonaro soon after announced the extension of *Operação Acolhida* before Temer’s order expired.¹⁶⁰ Much like the envoy, these actions illustrate how movement across the border has come to become deeply intertwined with politicized conceptions of humanitarianism and ideological legitimacy.

Local *roraimenses* usurping control of the mobility regime

Although I have already touched upon the ways in which the mobility regime in Brazil is constituted by a wide variety of agents exercising power from different points at different moments, I want to expand upon this idea in this section. Specifically, I will demonstrate how there are actors beyond the state that exercise control over the mobility of Venezuelan migrants. Earlier, I touched on the ways in which these supra-state agents produce and practice forms of mobility through processes of deterritorialization; now, I will illustrate how these same agents have worked to reinforce the border and symbolic forms of differentiation between the national territories and their residents. Of course, this is not to say that the mobility regime can be spliced into its constitutive parts and analyzed as an additive activity. In fact, I will explore the interaction between the state and these extra-state actors in order to illustrate how mobility regimes can be treated as ‘problem spaces’, in that they represent constantly transforming relations of power.

¹⁵⁹ “Governo Bolsonaro Retira o Brasil Do Pacto Global Pela Imigração Da ONU.” *Correio Braziliense*, January 8, 2019. <https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/brasil/2019/01/08/interna-brasil,729696/brasil-deixa-pacto-global-pela-imigracao-da-onu.shtml>.

¹⁶⁰ Maisonnave, Fabiano, and Avenir Prado. “Governo Bolsonaro Prorroga Acolhida De Venezuelanos Em Roraima.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 17, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/01/governo-bolsonaro-prorroga-acolhida-de-venezuelanos-em-roraima.shtml>.

As previously described, local authorities and news sources have constructed a spatial imaginary in the state of Roraima that treats it as an oasis that has been invaded and degraded by Venezuelan migrants. These discursive representations combined with the true economic, social, and political difficulties of the border region have generated a generalized xenophobic fear and frustration among the residents of Pacaraima and Boa Vista. Perhaps one of the most notable everyday manifestations of this hostility are the slurs used against Venezuelans near the border; one study reviewed a series of humor and news pages for the state of Roraima on social media and found that the use of terms such as *veneca* (pejorative slur to refer to Venezuelan migrants), *praga* (pest, infestation, plague), and *peste* (plague, pest) had become commonplace.¹⁶¹ Another slur often used against Venezuelans in the region is *oichenta* (a combination of *ochenta* and *oitenta*, the Spanish and Portuguese words for eighty), as a way to shame the Venezuelan sex workers who often charge a lower rate than their Brazilian counterparts (sometimes eighty reais, but oftentimes less).¹⁶² Considering the federal government, in tandem with international organizations and the civil society, had committed to a humanitarian response, this growing stigmatization of Venezuelan migrants led local residents to call on other state actors to take action to adopt a different approach to limit the flows. In addition to widespread support of the request to close the border, the population began to request additional policing of the cities, especially at night due to concerns about unemployed and homeless Venezuelans occupying the streets.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ A.D. Oliveira, Isaac, and E.G. Lacerda. “Imigração venezuelana e xenofobia em Roraima, Brasil.” Essay. In *Migrações Venezuelanas*, 231-235. Nepo/Unicamp, 2018. Brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf.

¹⁶² G. da Silva Sarmento, Gilmar, and F. dos Santos Rodrigues. “Entre a acolhida e o rechaço: breves notas sobre a violência e os paradoxos da migração venezuelana para o Brasil.” Essay. In *Migrações Venezuelanas*, 242-249. Nepo/Unicamp, 2018. Brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf.

¹⁶³ Gonzalo, Cora. “Com Comércio Em Crise, Onda De Violência Aumenta Em Pacaraima.” *Folha de Boa Vista*, November 26, 2016. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/CIDADES/Capital/Com-comercio-em-crise--onda-de--violencia-aumenta-em-Pacaraima/22781>.

However, the disconnect between the federal government and the local population led the latter group to take the impetus to secure the national territory into their own hands. On August 18, 2018, residents of Pacaraima initiated a peaceful protest against Venezuelan immigration, following an incident in which a Brazilian business owner was attacked and robbed by a group of Venezuelans. When the protest ended, residents began to circle the city in small groups, stealing and burning the belongings of Venezuelans, attacking localities that sheltered Venezuelans, and attacking them with rocks and improvised bombs. The residents' actions then turned from the city to the border, where they chased migrants past the border, until the Venezuelan authorities intervened to prevent the mob from crossing to their side.¹⁶⁴ Staying on the Brazilian side, the residents heckled the Brazilian Army for not intervening and supporting their efforts, sang the country's national anthem, and screamed out statements of hate against the "*venecas*" that they had chased out. The local state actors took very few actions to protect Venezuelans or diffuse the situation, as the army had limited jurisdiction to act as a police unit because it was deployed on a humanitarian mission. The only instances in which either the armed forces or local police intervened were to rope off the border in order to prevent Brazilians from continuing to pursue Venezuelans past the border and to protect Venezuelans that were hiding in the military area. Eventually, they constructed a makeshift barrier, consisting of a pile of tires that they had set on fire, to block Venezuelan access to the country.¹⁶⁵ Thus, in the face of a federal government refusing to close the border and police the region, the local residents felt emboldened to take border and immigration control into their own hands.

¹⁶⁴ Prado, Avenir, and Patrícia Campos Mello. "Venezuelanos e Brasileiros Se Confrontam Nas Ruas De Cidade De Roraima." *Folha de S.Paulo*, August 18, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/refugiados-venezuelanos-sao-agredidos-e-expulsos-de-tendas-em-roraima.shtml>.

¹⁶⁵ Prado, Avenir. "Eles Nos Expulsaram Como Cachorro, Diz Imigrante Venezuelana Em Roraima." *Folha de S.Paulo*, August 19, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/eles-nos-expulsaram-como-cachorro-diz-imigrante-venezuelana-em-roraima.shtml>.

Markedly, this local control exercised over the border and Venezuelan mobility was not a fleeting, momentary instance of anarchy, but rather a coordinated effort to reterritorialize the border region in spite of Brazilian state efforts to propagate fluid mobility. The following day, the Federal Highway Police negotiated a truce of sorts, allowing for the opening of the Troncal 10/BR-174 and, thus, the inflow of Venezuelans looking for refuge and the outflow of Brazilians looking for gas resumed, though the dynamics of these flows had changed. The number of Venezuelans crossing the border daily dropped from 800 to 1,000 to at least half this figure.¹⁶⁶ In addition, some sources reported that the local residents continued to operate as a pseudo-militia following the incident. Despite the opening of the highway, some were seen celebrating victory and cheering that, “*quem manda no Brasil é os brasileiros*” (“Brazilians are the ones who call the shots in Brazil”).¹⁶⁷ In the following days, both Venezuelans and Brazilians reported seeing local residents organizing *carreatas da paz* (motorcades of peace), de facto patrolling missions to prevent Venezuelan migrants from occupying the streets and public spaces of Pacaraima. Interestingly, the local police forces denied this information, claiming that the situation in the city had calmed down after the day of chaos. However, participants of the *carreatas da paz* openly spoke about their actions, as one of them explained that, “We are going to stop them from staying here, we are defending our home, our physical integrity. Almost all of them that were here were criminals.”¹⁶⁸ As one source described it, the residents forced migrants to live under an “informal curfew”, as many would spend the day in Pacaraima in search of food and working on

¹⁶⁶ Boechat, Yan. “‘Há Grupos De Brasileiros Caçando Venezuelanos Na Fronteira’, Diz Imigrante.” Folha de S.Paulo, August 23, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/ha-grupos-de-brasileiros-cacando-venezuelanos-na-fronteira-diz-imigrante.shtml>.

¹⁶⁷ Prado, Avenir. “Eles Nos Expulsaram Como Cachorro, Diz Imigrante Venezuelana Em Roraima.” Folha de S.Paulo, August 19, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/eles-nos-expulsaram-como-cachorro-diz-imigrante-venezuelana-em-roraima.shtml>.

¹⁶⁸ Boechat, Yan. “‘Há Grupos De Brasileiros Caçando Venezuelanos Na Fronteira’, Diz Imigrante.” Folha de S.Paulo, August 23, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/ha-grupos-de-brasileiros-cacando-venezuelanos-na-fronteira-diz-imigrante.shtml>.

their documentation and then spend the night just across the border, in a small, covered area near a truck stop on the Venezuelan side.¹⁶⁹

However, the locally deployed reterritorialization strategy was ultimately transformed because of the federal government's intervention, illustrating the ways in which the mobility regime represents a problem space where different agents interact and compete with one another. Initially, the federal government ordered a group of 120 members of the National Force and a group of 36 health professionals to be sent to the region in order to control the actions of the residents and attend to the migrants that had been injured.¹⁷⁰ In addition, by the end of the month, former president Michel Temer signed a decree of Guarantee of Law and Order (GLO), an executive power that the president can use in instances of extreme disorder when traditional security forces have been exhausted. Although the decree did not order additional members of the Armed Forces to be sent to the region, it authorized the roughly 700 military members already at the border (both with Venezuela and with Guyana) to act as a police force. In other words, if another attack were to occur against Venezuelan migrants, they would then have the legal sanction to intervene.¹⁷¹ However, the additional police presence of the state did not negate entirely the influence of local residents on the mobility regime. For instance, in 2019, residents organized another protest to request further security and organization of the border city, which scared migrants and led them to seek protection in the *Operação Acolhida* posts in anticipation

¹⁶⁹ Boechat, Yan. "Há Grupos De Brasileiros Caçando Venezuelanos Na Fronteira", *Diz Imigrante*. Folha de S.Paulo, August 23, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/ha-grupos-de-brasileiros-cacando-venezuelanos-na-fronteira-diz-imigrante.shtml>.

¹⁷⁰ Mariz, Renata, and Catarina Alencastro. "Governo Divulga Medidas Para Combater Violência Contra Venezuelanos Em Roraima." *O Globo*, August 19, 2018. <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/governo-divulga-medidas-para-combater-violencia-contra-venezuelanos-em-roraima-22992919>.

¹⁷¹ Correia, Cyneida. "700 Homens Do Exército Já Atuam Nas Fronteiras." *Folha de Boa Vista*, August 31, 2018. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/POLITICA/Roraima/700-homens-do-Exercito-ja-atuam--nas-fronteiras-/43401>.

of a recurrence of the violence from the year prior.¹⁷² Notably, the fact that the migrants chose to seek protection from the military likely indicates their recognition of the shifting power dynamics instituted by the GLO. Therefore, the interaction between the strategies deployed by both the state and the local residents, competing to accommodate and bar the influx of migrants, have produced dynamic outcomes on Venezuelan mobility within the region.

¹⁷² Maisonnave, Fabiano. “Protesto Em Roraima Pede Mais Ordem Na Fronteira e Assusta Venezuelanos.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, August 17, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/08/um-ano-apos-confronto-com-venezuelanos-moradores-brasileiros-protestam.shtml>.

Chapter V: Rerouting channels of migration—a strategy of territorial ambiguities

In this chapter, I want to address the third prong of the *Operação Acolhida* strategy that has generated perhaps the most international attention concerning the Brazilian response to the Venezuelan crisis: the interiorization program. The strategy aims to voluntarily relocate Venezuelan migrants living in Roraima to other areas of the country. Because of the humanitarian principles that underlie the program, many have lauded it and the Brazilian government for its ingenuity in designing such a novel solution. In the next two sections, however, I want to engage in a critical analysis of some of the theoretical and practical considerations relating to the program. Firstly, I will demonstrate how interiorizing migrants has underscored the limitations of mobility as an emancipatory resource. In this sense, I affirm the new mobilities scholars' assertion that mobility cannot be romanticized. Secondly, I will analyze the way in which the interiorization program has somewhat distracted from the underlying issues related to integration in the state of Roraima. By engaging with the concepts of topography and topology, I argue that the redistribution of migrants throughout the country should not stand in place of the need to transform the border region to better accommodate future migratory influxes.

Interiorization as a strategy of displaced immobilities

Whereas the previously described reception and sheltering strategies are intended to accommodate the influx of Venezuelan migrants at the border, the interiorization program aims to achieve long-term integration of the population by dispersing them to other cities throughout

the country. Due to concerns about the social and economic capacity of Roraima to receive such a large influx of people, the government included this component in *Operação Acolhida*, believing that the larger job markets and stronger infrastructure of other regions of the country would be better equipped to receive them. The program is entirely voluntary, meaning any Venezuelan living in Roraima that pertains to one of its designated modalities of eligibility can opt into the program. These modalities have been expanded over time in order to give a wider range of Venezuelans the possibility of being interiorized. The first departure of Venezuelan migrants took place on April 4, 2018¹⁷³, at which point the modalities were: institutional, where a migrant could be transferred to a shelter in another city where an opening became available; family reunification, where a family member living in another city could agree to accept a migrant living in Roraima to be transferred to them; and civil society, where an organization from the civil society assumes responsibility for receiving them in another city.¹⁷⁴ Shortly after, the ‘job opening’ modality was added, allowing for migrants to be transferred if a company expressed interest in hiring them for a position in another city. Furthermore, the ‘family reunification’ modality was expanded to cover ‘social reunification’ as well, meaning any Venezuelan with housing in another city who is willing to accept a migrant from the border could also participate.¹⁷⁵ (Some sources still maintain a distinction between social and family reunification in their reporting, while others aggregate the two.)

¹⁷³ Maisonnave, Fabiano, and Avenir Prado. “Interiorização De Venezuelanos Terá 'Hub' Em Campinas.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, January 14, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/01/interiorizacao-de-venezuelanos-tera-hub-em-campinas.shtml>.

¹⁷⁴ Smolansky, David. Rep. Situación De Los Migrantes y Refugiados Venezolanos En Brasil. Organization of American States, December 12, 2019. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-031/19.

¹⁷⁵ Mantovani, Flávia. “Após 1 Ano, Interiorização De Venezuelanos Alivia Roraima, Mas Falha Na Integração Local.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, April 3, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/04/interiorizacao-de-venezuelanos-alivia-roraima-mas-falha-na-integracao-local.shtml>.

All in all, *Operação Acolhida* is thus divided into three key phases—reception, sheltering, and interiorization—to form a simple, but comprehensive linear succession for migrants. Ideally, migrants pass through the border and begin to complete the documentation to obtain legal status to be in the country. They are expected to stay in the shelters for roughly 15 to 45 days. In this time, they have the option to express interest in participating in the interiorization program and complete the corresponding requirements, which, beyond being legally documented, include being vaccinated, being in good health condition based on a clinical evaluation, and consenting to participating in the process with a signed form.¹⁷⁶ For the job opening and family reunification modalities, the destination is clearly contingent on where the company or family member (or friend) are located. For the civil society and institutional modules, migrants do not have the option of choosing what city they are placed in, but they do have the ability to turn down an opening once it becomes available.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, the process by which migrants are matched with civil society organizations or shelters is entirely based on the profile of these organizations (e.g., some are better equipped to receive families, others are better equipped for unaccompanied adults). From there, transportation is handled entirely by the various agents in *Operação Acolhida*, with the majority of flights being conducted by the Brazilian Air Force (FAB), the remaining commercial flights purchased by the IOM or civil society organizations, and bus tickets (to Manaus) purchased by *Operação Acolhida*.¹⁷⁸

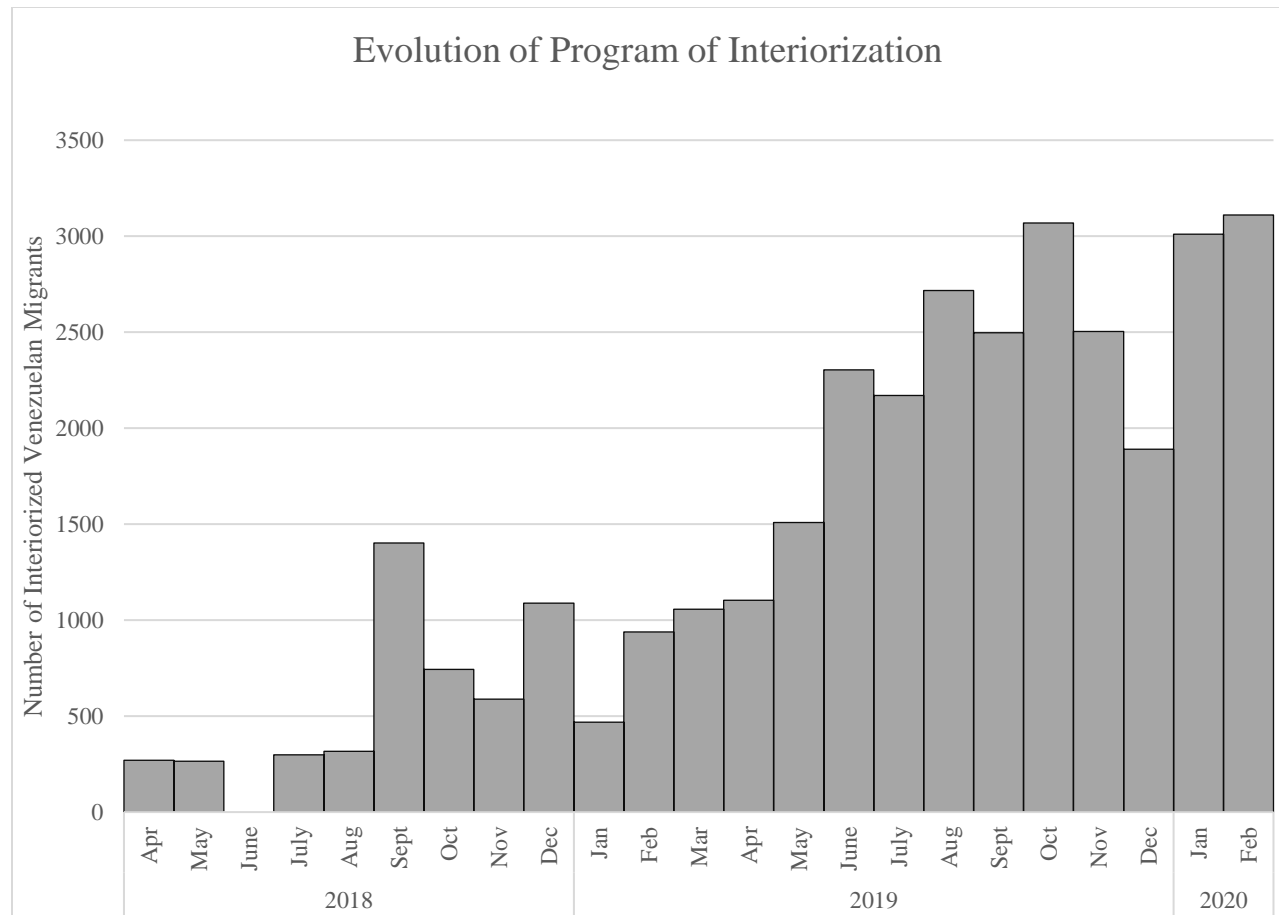
¹⁷⁶ Smolansky, David. Rep. Situación De Los Migrantes y Refugiados Venezolanos En Brasil. Organization of American States, December 12, 2019. https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=D-031/19.

¹⁷⁷ Mantovani, Flávia. “Após 1 Ano, Interiorização De Venezuelanos Alivia Roraima, Mas Falha Na Integração Local.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, April 3, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/04/interiorizacao-de-venezuelanos-alivia-roraima-mas-falha-na-integracao-local.shtml>.

¹⁷⁸ Rep. *Informe De Interiorização*. Subcomitê Federal para Interiorização, January 2020. http://blog.mds.gov.br/redesuas/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Informe-de-Interioriza%C3%A7%C3%A3o-_Janeiro-de-2020-002.pdf.

During the two-year period from the program's inception to prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, these agents from *Operação Acolhida* as well as local and state governments throughout Brazil collaborated greatly in order to expand it, both in terms of quantity of migrants resettled and geographical reach of this resettlement. As seen in Figure 21,

Figure 21: Bar chart of interiorized Venezuelans from April 2018 to February 2020¹⁷⁹



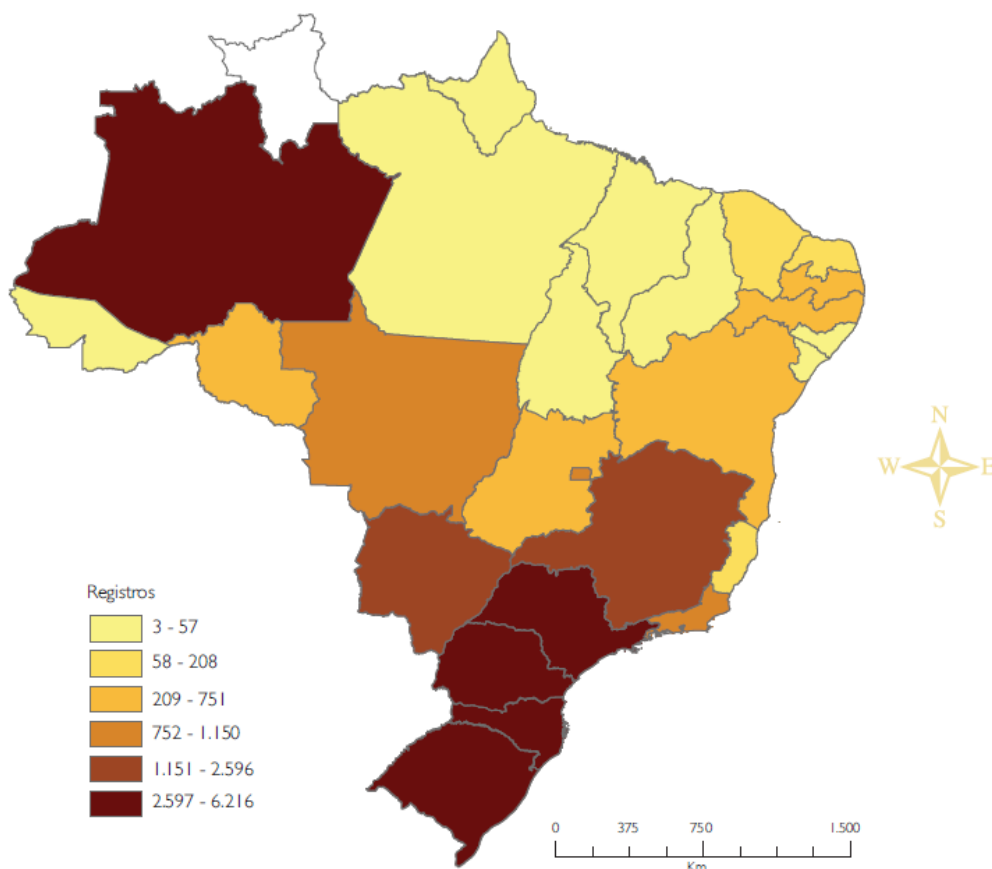
the number of Venezuelans that pass through the interiorization program on a monthly basis grew by a factor of 10, beginning around 300 migrants per month to just over 3,000 in the beginning of 2020. Although the program initially only resettled migrants to São Paulo (SP) and

¹⁷⁹ Baeninger, Rosana, et al., editors. Universidade Estadual De Campinas, 2020, *Atlas Temático Do Observatório Das Migrações Em São Paulo e Do Observatório Das Migrações Internacionais No Estado De Minas Gerias - Migrações Venezuelanas*. www.nepo.unicamp.br/publicacoes/_atlasvenezuela.php.

Cuiabá (MT)¹⁸⁰, by the beginning of 2020, it had expanded to a total of 448 cities and every state in the country.¹⁸¹ Figure 22 shows the total geographic distribution, and Figure 23 shows the

Figure 22: Distribution of interiorized Venezuelans from April 2018 to April 2020¹⁸²

Imigrantes internacionais da Venezuelana no Programa de Interiorização segundo Unidades da Federação do Brasil, de 04/2018 a 04/2020



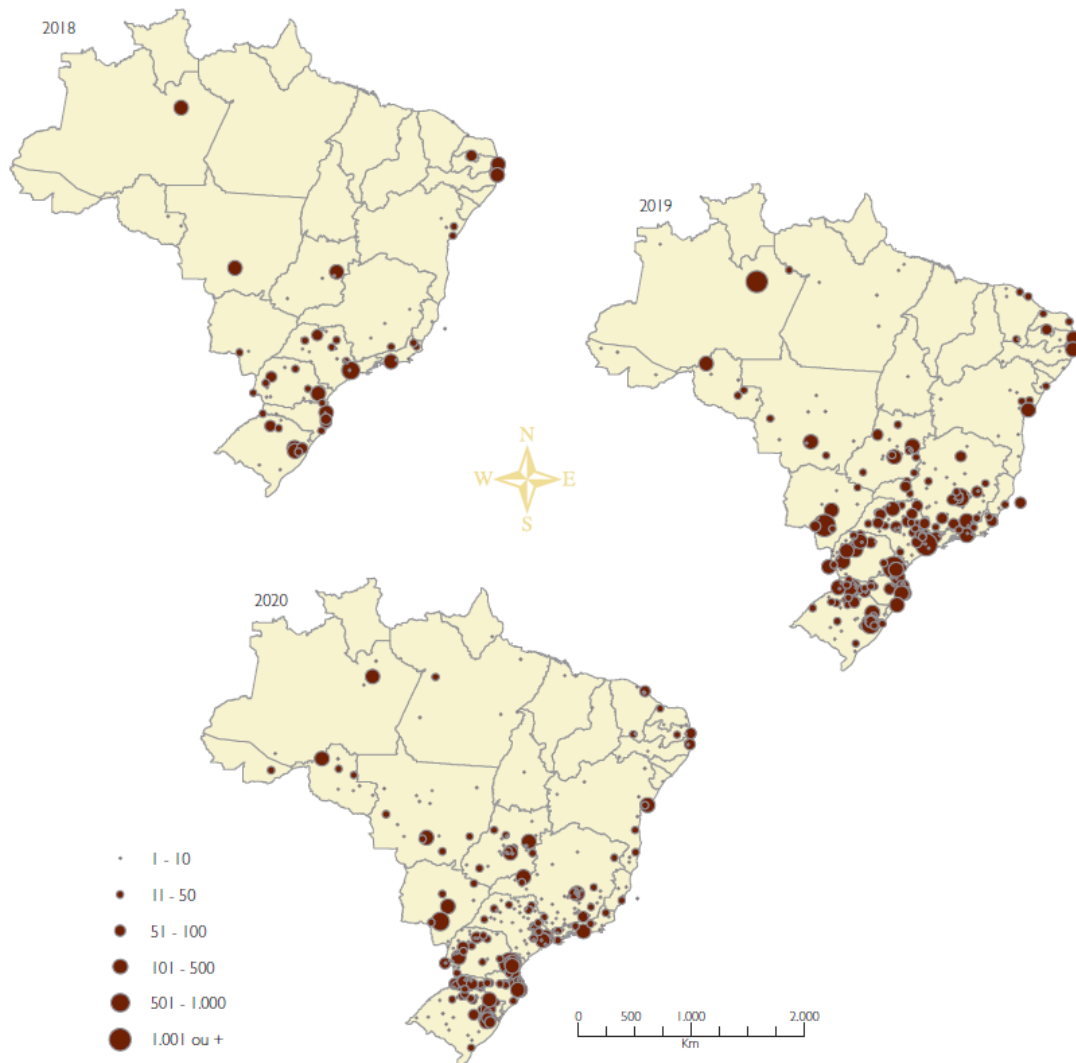
¹⁸⁰ Mantovani, Flávia. “Após 1 Ano, Interiorização De Venezuelanos Alivia Roraima, Mas Falha Na Integração Local.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, April 3, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/04/interiorizacao-de-venezuelanos-alivia-roraima-mas-falha-na-integracao-local.shtml>.

¹⁸¹ Rep. *Informe De Interiorização*. Subcomitê Federal para Interiorização, January 2020. http://blog.mds.gov.br/redesuas/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Informe-de-Interioriza%C3%A7%C3%A3o-_Janeiro-de-2020-002.pdf.

¹⁸² Baeninger, Rosana, et al., editors. Universidade Estadual De Campinas, 2020, *Atlas Temático Do Observatório Das Migrações Em São Paulo e Do Observatório Das Migrações Internacionais No Estado De Minas Geras - Migrações Venezuelanas*. www.nepo.unicamp.br/publicacoes/_atlasvenezuela.php.

Figure 23: Change in distribution of interiorized Venezuelans from 2018 to 2020¹⁸³

Imigrantes da Venezuela interiorizados no período de 05 de abril de 2018 a 10 de julho de 2020 segundo município de destino e ano, Brasil
(2018= 4.972; 2019=22.228; 2020= 11.599)



expansion of this distribution over time.

The interiorization program has come to garner notable international attention in the context of the regional response to the Venezuelan diaspora, as it is one of the most novel

¹⁸³ Baeninger, Rosana, et al., editors. Universidade Estadual De Campinas, 2020, *Atlas Temático Do Observatório Das Migrações Em São Paulo e Do Observatório Das Migrações Internacionais No Estado De Minas Gerias - Migrações Venezuelanas*. www.nepo.unicamp.br/publicacoes/_atlasvenezuela.php.

mechanisms that any government has adopted. Specifically, I want to focus on the question of local integration, as the program has been advertised as *Operação Acolhida*'s main strategy for socio-economic integration. As can be seen in Figures 22 and 23, the program has sent the vast majority of migrants to locations in the South and Southeast regions of the country. At face value, this redistribution seems as though it would represent immense progress towards integrating migrants, especially considering that these two regions concentrate 70.3% of the country's GDP (compared with 5.4% in the North).¹⁸⁴ Nonetheless, problems have arisen. Many of the receiving cities were unfamiliar with migrant integration, thus incapable of sufficiently supporting Venezuelans in finding jobs, finding housing, learning the language, or dealing with their documentation.¹⁸⁵ In many cities, for instance, migrants are transferred to shelters meant for individuals struggling with addiction or facing homelessness.¹⁸⁶ In fact, a study of the shelters tracked by the UNHCR at the end of 2018 found that only 40 percent of interiorized migrants eligible to work had found a job. Despite establishing working groups in large destination cities, such as São Paulo and Caxias de Sul (in Rio Grande do Sul), to continue to monitor and support interiorized migrants, many of these groups stopped operating. As such, organizations from the civil society in these cities reported cases of migrants facing labor exploitation and homelessness. As João Carlos Jarochinski, a professor from the Federal University of Roraima,

¹⁸⁴ Alvarenga, Darlan. "Região Norte Lidera Crescimento Em 2018 e Sudeste Eleva Participação No PIB Para 53,1%." O Globo, November 13, 2020. <https://g1.globo.com/economia/noticia/2020/11/13/regiao-norte-lidera-crescimento-em-2018-e-sudeste-eleva-participacao-no-pib-para-531percent.ghtml>.

¹⁸⁵ Mantovani, Flávia. "Após 1 Ano, Interiorização De Venezuelanos Alivia Roraima, Mas Falha Na Integração Local." Folha de S.Paulo, April 3, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/04/interiorizacao-de-venezuelanos-alivia-roraima-mas-falha-na-integracao-local.shtml>.

¹⁸⁶ Campos Mello, Patrícia. "Há Pólvora No Chão' Diz General Que Comanda Missão Humanitária Em Roraima." Folha de S.Paulo, August 23, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/ha-polvora-no-chao-diz-general-que-comanda-missao-humanitaria-em-roraima.shtml>.

noted, this interiorization combined with a lack of integration represents a “transference of vulnerability.”¹⁸⁷ In this sense, mobility in and of itself is insufficient to achieve integration.

In response to these concerns, countless agents at several different levels have had to mobilize in order to transform the embodied reality of interiorization. Perhaps the most salient evidence of this local transformation accompanying the interiorization program is the civil society response, with countless organizations mobilizing to meet the needs of the growing Venezuelan populations in their respective cities, such as Migraflix in São Paulo or Círculos de Hospitalidade in Santa Catarina. It would be well outside the scope of this project to go into detail on these types of efforts throughout any of the over 400 municipalities that participate in the interiorization program, but I want to highlight one specific effort as an example of the transformation of local and national infrastructure that has not received due attention. The federal government, upon recognizing these integration issues, launched a strategy at the beginning of 2020 to establish *Núcleos Regionais de Interiorização* (Regional Interiorization Centers, NURIN), a series of offices throughout the twelve military regions of the country with both military personnel and staff from the UNHCR to coordinate integration efforts. Specifically, these regional hubs would connect with individuals from the local civil society, private sector, and governments and municipalities in order to strengthen and integrate support networks.¹⁸⁸ The establishment of the NURINs not only represents the way in which the Brazilian migratory landscape is in constant transformation in order to respond to these needs, but it also creates an agile infrastructure to support the continued growth and change of this local infrastructure. In

¹⁸⁷ Mantovani, Flávia. “Após 1 Ano, Interiorização De Venezuelanos Alivia Roraima, Mas Falha Na Integração Local.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, April 3, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/04/interiorizacao-de-venezuelanos-alivia-roraima-mas-falha-na-integracao-local.shtml>.

¹⁸⁸ Rep. *Balanço De Interiorização*. UNHCR, July 2020. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Balanco%20interiorizacao%20ACNUR%20Outubro-Novembro%2018.12.20.pdf>.

this sense, such efforts indicate a shift in the national strategy away from a romanticization of mobility which, in effect, displaced immobilities to places outside of the border region.

Roraima: imagining topological futures

Although the interiorization program is advancing throughout the country, I want to call attention to the implications that the underlying logic of the program holds for the state of Roraima. Over the course of the expansion of the program, discourses have shifted, such that it does not represent an integration strategy so much as a liberating form of movement for Venezuelans experiencing a disconnect between their envisioned and embodied migration experience—an escape. Although the program was inaugurated prior to the attacks of the summer of 2018, this incident came to serve as a justification for the rapid expansion and intensification of the program.¹⁸⁹ Specifically, Viviane Esse, special advisor of the Casa Civil, announced plans to interiorize a thousand Venezuelans by the beginning of September of that year, a notable increase considering the government had only been able to transfer 820 people in the six months up to that point. She cited several measures that would streamline the process, including renting spaces to shelter Venezuelans in other cities.¹⁹⁰ These actions were justified not only based on the real threat facing Venezuelans living in Roraima, but also the desires of these migrants themselves. Whereas one news outlet reported that as 8 out of every 10 migrants

¹⁸⁹ Mariz, Renata, and Catarina Alencastro. “Governo Divulga Medidas Para Combater Violência Contra Venezuelanos Em Roraima.” *O Globo*, August 19, 2018. <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/governo-divulga-medidas-para-combater-violencia-contra-venezuelanos-em-roraima-22992919>.

¹⁹⁰ Campos Mello, Patrícia. “Há Pólvora No Chão' Diz General Que Comanda Missão Humanitária Em Roraima.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, August 23, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/ha-polvora-no-chao-diz-general-que-comanda-missao-humanitaria-em-roraima.shtml>.

reported the desire to leave the region leading up to the attacks,¹⁹¹ the UNHCR found that that figure was once as high as 90 percent.¹⁹² There are, of course, Venezuelan migrants would prefer to stay near the border in hopes of being able to return to their country one day and to facilitate the sending of goods and money to family members at home; however, in light of the pressures on local systems, many preferred to find refuge elsewhere.¹⁹³ Whereas the mobility regime initially began rerouting channels of mobility in order to achieve socioeconomic integration of these migrants, it came to focus more on questions of protecting migrants and diffusing the tensions that had accumulated in the region.

In the same breath, by sponsoring Venezuelan movement out of the border region, to some extent, the strategy inadvertently validates the xenophobic fears and anger of local residents. When seen in the context of the local residents' reterritorialization strategy, which treated Venezuelan migration into the region as threatening and aimed to expel these individuals, the program seems to affirm this rejection of the prospect of a deterritorialized border region. For instance, Eduardo Pazuello, the then coordinator of the humanitarian task force in Roraima, announced his support of the intensification of the program in order to avoid the future occurrence of similar incidents of violence.¹⁹⁴ This, of course, treats the accumulation of Venezuelans as the root of the problem (as opposed to the xenophobic sentiments of the border population stemming from the frail local infrastructure). Indeed, the program has confirmed

¹⁹¹ Alegretti, Laís. "Entre Venezuelanos, 8 a Cada 10 Querem Deixar Região De Fronteira." *Folha de S.Paulo*, August 20, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/entre-venezuelanos-8-a-cada-10-querem-deixar-regiao-de-fronteira.shtml>.

¹⁹² "Venezuelanos Dizem Que Boa Vista Colapsou e Querem Deixar Roraima." *Folha de S.Paulo*, August 29, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/venezuelanos-dizem-que-boa-vista-colapsou-e-querem-deixar-roraima.shtml>.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Campos Mello, Patrícia. "Há Pólvora No Chão' Diz General Que Comanda Missão Humanitária Em Roraima." *Folha de S.Paulo*, August 23, 2018. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2018/08/ha-polvora-no-chao-diz-general-que-comanda-missao-humanitaria-em-roraima.shtml>.

xenophobic sentiments among the local population. For instance, one study that reviewed social media pages of border residents in Roraima found people praising the interiorization program, with comments such as “they should take all Venezuelans away from here” and “get rid of them all! And close the border”.¹⁹⁵ In the xenophobic imaginary of a local resident, an interiorized Venezuelan is equivalent to a deported Venezuelan, as the final destination is of little importance as long as it is not Roraima. This is perhaps what is most notable about the interiorization program—although it may represent a form of deterritorialization on the national scale, it simultaneously reinforces the reterritorialization of the border region. This is not to say that xenophobia has not been addressed in the region, nor that the interiorization program is based on innately xenophobic principles. Rather, these observations highlight a key insight concerning the ongoing power that local agents continue to exercise within the mobility regime. In addition to having shaped the discursive representations of Venezuelan mobility that triggered the intensification of the interiorization program, the local authorities and population were able to successfully influence and coopt the ways in which these mobilities are practiced.

Furthermore, even though the principles underlying the program are not inherently xenophobic, I would like to denaturalize the way in which they treat the Brazilian landscape. Many of the ideas that have justified the need for interiorization treat Roraima as a topographical object. Topography refers to an approach to describing and quantifying landscapes in which space is treated as absolute or as a container, composed of units that are internally coherent and externally distinct.¹⁹⁶ When referring to the program, many people treat it as a truism that

¹⁹⁵ A.D. Oliveira, Isaac, and E.G. Lacerda. “Imigracao venezuelana e xenofobia em Roraima, Brasil.” Essay. In *Migrações Venezuelanas*, 231-235. Nepo/Unicamp, 2018. [Brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf](https://brasil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/migrações_venezuelanas.pdf).

¹⁹⁶ Lash, Scott. “Deforming the Figure: Topology and the Social Imaginary.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 4-5 (2012): 261–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276412448829>.

Roraima does not have the capacity to sustain a large number of residents. For instance, Antonio Manoel de Barros, the new operational coordinator of *Operação Acolhida* who assumed control of the mission at the beginning of 2020, explained that his strict focus would be on expanding interiorization further, because Roraima could never sustain such flows, which would “collapse” the system.¹⁹⁷ By treating the current status of Roraima as immutable and innate, the conditions which produced it are entirely overlooked. In fact, many of the critiques that have arisen concerning the interiorization program is that it distracts from integration issues within Roraima. Although the majority of Venezuelans surveyed after the attacks in Pacaraima wanted to leave the region, a prior survey from the IOM found that, of those migrants that wanted to stay in Brazil, the vast majority expressed the desire to live in the border region, with 59 percent wanting to live in Amazonas and 22 percent in Roraima.¹⁹⁸ In light of such insights, Camila Asano, program coordinator with Conectas, has advocated for a new pillar of *Operação Acolhida* that focuses on integration in the state in order to build lasting solutions for these migrants.¹⁹⁹

Perhaps the clearest example of the way in which such a topographical approach fails to create long-term solutions can be seen in Manaus. Given the fact that Manaus is directly connected to Boa Vista via the BR-174, seen in Figure 24, it has come to be one of the cities

¹⁹⁷ Carvalho, Paola. “Novo Coordenador Descarta a Criação De Novos Abrigos Em Roraima.” Folha de Boa Vista, January 24, 2020. <https://folhabv.com.br/noticia/POLITICA/Roraima/Novo-coordenador-descarta-a-criacao-de-novos-abrigos-em-Roraima-/62027>.

¹⁹⁸ Ramsey, Geoff, and Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli. Washington Office on Latin America, 2018, Responding to an Exodus: Venezuela’s Migration and Refugee Crisis as Seen From the Colombian and Brazilian Borders, www.wola.org/analysis/responding-exodus-venezuelas-migration-refugee-crisis-seen-colombian-brazilian-borders/

¹⁹⁹ Mantovani, Flávia. “Após 1 Ano, Interiorização De Venezuelanos Alivia Roraima, Mas Falha Na Integração Local.” Folha de S.Paulo, April 3, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/04/interiorizacao-de-venezuelanos-alivia-roraima-mas-falha-na-integracao-local.shtml>.

Figure 24: Map of the segment of the BR-174 running through Roraima²⁰⁰



that has received the largest number of migrants. In addition to being able to take a bus running along the BR-174 from Boa Vista to Manaus, migrants could also reach the city by means of the interiorization program. In fact, the city came to be the number one recipient of interiorized Venezuelans in Brazil, having received 4,572 migrants in the period from April 2018 to April 2020 (over 2,000 more than the second highest city of São Paulo).²⁰¹ However, the state of Amazonas in general, and its capital city of Manaus as well, was similarly ill-equipped to receive such an influx.²⁰² As early as 2017, there were reports of indigenous Venezuelans leaving

²⁰⁰ Louzada, Jaime, et al. "The Impact of Imported Malaria by Gold Miners in Roraima: Characterizing the Spatial Dynamics of Autochthonous and Imported Malaria in an Urban Region of Boa Vista." *Memórias do Instituto Oswaldo Cruz* 115 (2020): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0074-02760200043>.

²⁰¹ Baeninger, Rosana, et al., editors. Universidade Estadual De Campinas, 2020, *Atlas Temático Do Observatório Das Migrações Em São Paulo e Do Observatório Das Migrações Internacionais No Estado De Minas Geras - Migrações Venezuelanas*. www.nepo.unicamp.br/publicacoes/_atlasvenezuela.php.

²⁰² Montenegro, Carolina. "A Dificil Vida Das Crianças e Jovens Venezuelanos No Norte Do Brasil, Em Meio a Crise De Refugiados." *O Globo*, June 19, 2019. <https://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2019/06/19/a-dificil-vida-das-criancas-e-jovens-venezuelanos-no-norte-do-brasil-em-meio-a-crise-de-refugiados.ghtml>.

shelters in Manaus to attempt to establish a life in the neighboring state of Pará, given the limited economic opportunities they found in Amazonas.²⁰³ In fact, by 2019, Manaus was the capital city with the highest unemployment rate in the country. As such, in mid-2019, the federal government made the decision to extend *Operação Acolhida* to the city, especially in light of the incredibly long wait times to apply for asylum (an average of three months at the time). Unlike in Boa Vista, however, the extension of federal assistance did not set up an extensive network of shelters to house the migrants, but rather aimed to bring other services to the state, including improved document emission, resources to attend to populations living in the streets, and interiorization.²⁰⁴ In other words, in a little over a year, Manaus went from being the most important destination for interiorization to becoming an origin site for the program. This fact perhaps most clearly illustrates the shortcomings of the program as the key integration strategy. It underscores the ways in which, at a federal level, there is a greater concern with distribution rather than integration per se. Just as in Boa Vista, rather than addressing the underlying structural issues that hinder Venezuelan integration, the response was to disperse misery and precarity outside of Manaus, so as not to come to a head in a highly visible and violent manner as in Pacaraima.

As such, just like Camila Asano from Conectas, I want to suggest a more topological approach to building solutions for the state of Roraima. The field of topology emerged in response to concerns about topography, contending that space is continuous, connected, and in constant de/reformation. As Lash explains, “a topographical object is a form, a fixed form. The

²⁰³ Maisonnave, Fabiano. “Indígenas Venezuelanos Se Espalham Pela Amazônia e Já Chegam a Belém.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, October 21, 2017. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2017/10/1929013-indigenas-venezuelanos-se-espalham-pela-amazonia-e-ja-chegam-a-belem.shtml>.

²⁰⁴ Maisonnave, Fabiano. “Operação Do Governo Para Interiorização De Venezuelanos Será Estendida a Manaus.” *Folha de S.Paulo*, June 4, 2019. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/06/operacao-do-governo-para-interiorizacao-de-venezuelanos-sera-estendida-a-manaus.shtml>.

topological object is anti-form, in-form, de-form.”²⁰⁵ In other words, topology is less concerned with specifying and quantifying readable differences between places, but rather understanding the ways in which these spatial characteristics may converge or diverge through constant processes of transformation. Notably, the Brazilian federal government and other large players in the national mobility regime have already begun adopting a more topological approach to the issue, as exemplified in the previously described changes to localities receiving Venezuelans in other regions. By investing in the social and economic capacity of the border region itself, the government would not only provide a more sustainable option for migrants who wish to maintain proximity to the border but would also address underlying issues faced by Brazilian residents of the state that have produced both resentment against the federal government and the recently arrived Venezuelan migrants. I do not mean to oversimplify this issue, as I recognize that increasing economic development of the region has historically entailed colonial forms of violence against indigenous communities and ecological depletion of the environment. Indeed, at the same time that topological thinking encourages us to imagine future transformations of the spaces around us, it also calls us to reflect on the changes that have led to the current state of affairs, such as this deep colonial history. It is precisely this linkage of past and future forms of transformation that can revolutionize the current stagnant and topographical views of Roraima in order to build long-term solutions for Venezuelan migrants.

²⁰⁵ Lash, Scott. “Deforming the Figure: Topology and the Social Imaginary.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 4-5 (2012): 265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276412448829>.

Chapter VI: Final considerations

In this thesis, I have aimed to bring a variety of geographical theories into dialogue with the reality of Venezuelan migration in Brazil using a mixed-methods approach. From a theoretical perspective, this work highlights the value of the contributions of the new mobilities scholars to the social sciences. Specifically, the dialectics that they have proposed—whether between mobility and immobility or deterritorialization and reterritorialization—have strong empirical explanatory power and offer sophisticated insights into the complex transformation of strategies within mobility regimes. Perhaps the most critical contribution of these scholars, as it relates to this project, is the relatively ambivalent nature of mobility as a resource. Such an insight serves as an impetus to ask more critical questions, as I have done throughout this work, to further understand the conditions that facilitate or inhibit different forms of mobility.

Furthermore, mobility scholars' emphasis on mobility as both a discursive representation and embodied practice was particularly useful for underscoring the ways in which several different agents participate within the mobility regime and exert power over mobility at different points.

Secondly, from a methodological standpoint, my work illustrates the value of local and national news sources as a way of understanding not only dominant discourses, but also to understand the daily, lived experiences of these regimes at a closer level. One of the most notable gaps in my project was the fact that I was unable to conduct extensive fieldwork. In particular, the voice of the migrant is clearly missing from this piece. Initially, I was concerned that these limitations would prevent me from being able to produce a piece of work that was relevant to the specific conditions of the Venezuela-Brazil border. However, I was happily surprised to find that a wide variety of the news articles that I reviewed provided a deeply ethnographic picture of the border. Especially considering many of the journalists act as 'researchers in the field', they were

not only able to glean critical insights about the migrant experience, but they also could speak to the reality of the border being residents of the region themselves (or having spent swaths of time there). It was a formative experience to be able to review these articles because, upon identifying the disparities between the stories recounted in secondary sources and the stories presented in the articles, I was able to see for myself the selective process that researchers must constantly engage in to pull specific points of interest from primary data. This exercise—seeing what elements in the articles stuck out to me that other researchers had not previously noted—helped me to better understand and recognize my own particular interests and contributions as a researcher.

Last, this project holds key empirical insights for those engaged in the response to Venezuelan migration in Brazil, whether from an academic, professional, or personal perspective. While conducting initial research for this project, I found that, because of the overwhelming positive and humanitarian response that the Brazilian government has launched, many people on the international stage somewhat overlooked some of the more concerning issues present in Roraima. Specifically, many sources reduced all of the instances I discussed in Chapter IV to “some local instances of xenophobia,” which does not necessarily capture the nature of the violence that exists at the border, nor the broader historical and social context of this violence that I discussed in Chapter II. As well, there has been little attention paid to the role of the police and military in the response, although they play an integral role in *Operação Acolhida*. Recognizing some of the early signs of issues that I have signaled in this project will be crucial going forward. I just recently saw a headline about a police invasion of a shelter in Roraima and the subsequent arrest of a nun that worked there. Especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers must pay attention to the transformation of how police power is exercised within the mobility regime. Furthermore, as traffic continues to increase throughout

the region and the mobility regime continues to adapt to this, it will be critical to pay attention to the historical forms of colonialism in Roraima and current opportunities and challenges both for indigenous migrants and indigenous residents that I have highlighted through this piece.

Specifically, more work that builds upon this understanding of the ways in which mobility is differentially practiced and experienced among the varied indigenous community in the region, such as the Warao and Pemón, would be incredibly beneficial to building more appropriate and strategic solutions.

Policy implications

Finally, I want to end by emphasizing that glamorous policy solutions such as the interiorization program cannot replace a long-term integration strategy for the state of Roraima. Roraima has long been stuck in a kind of limbo, having served as somewhat of a ‘playground’ for the Brazilian state to enact a variety of different policies and projects when it was strategic for the nation, few of which have really been sustained over time. Roraima needs a long-term strategy that will address the socio-economic needs of local residents and Venezuelan migrants alike, while also respecting the sovereignty and land rights of the extensive networks of indigenous communities that have historically occupied the region. More generally, it is time for the Brazilian state to develop a more agile and robust migratory framework. Many of the government actions and policies I have discussed in this work are initiatives propelled by specific politicians. It is unclear how the country will choose to deal with these migratory flows under future administrations. Similarly, many of these measures apply exclusively to Venezuelan migrants. If and when the next major influx from a neighboring country occurs, Brazil will find itself once again instituting provisional measures to quickly work to accommodate migrants.

Although there will inevitably be pendular struggles between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, by focusing on long-term policy solutions rather than reactionary measures, Brazil could better anticipate and account for these territorial struggles.